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Double-Decker;

OR,

CENTER-FIRE, the SELF-COCKER.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW COFFIN.

"ROARING RIVER" was a roaring camp
in a double sense.

The falls of the river, close to which the
camp stood, kept up an incessant monot-

"UNGODLY SONS, DESIST!"

onous roar, and occasionally the camp did some "roaring" on its own account.

The name of the camp was the same as that of the river, as is the case in many instances throughout the land. The camp had borrowed the appellation for want of something better, and it had been found to answer the purpose.

It was, at the time of our story, one of the most important hydraulic mining-camps in all Nevada.

The product was silver.

The falls of Roaring River were nearly a thousand feet in sheer descent, and from the level above an enormous pressure of water was obtained, by means of heavy iron conduits.

There was a large population, and the town had many of the conveniences of a place many times its actual size. There were several stores, a big hotel, a bank, an Express Office, a newspaper, a school and two churches; and there were saloons almost without limit.

The hotel mentioned was the "Lullaby Roost," so-called because it stood close to the falls, the noise of which drowned almost every other sound and made sleeping an easy thing.

Perhaps the most popular place in the whole camp, of an evening, was the bar-room of Lullaby Roost.

It was the largest single room in the whole camp.

Elegantly fitted up, it furnished space for dancing and for gambling, providing music for the former and everything necessary for the latter.

The camp had electric lights, the power being obtained from the falls at no expense, and by night the saloon of the Lullaby Roost was a blaze of light. The front of the room was almost all glass, and the rear was one expanse of mirrors.

To this room attention is invited.

The business of the evening was going at full blast, and everybody was trying to get all the enjoyment possible out of the fleeting hour.

Above every other sound was the heavy, dull roar of the falls, but this was a constant monotone, and when ears were once accustomed to it other sounds could be distinguished when the senses were alert.

Of a sudden, ejaculations were heard.

Men and women looking in the direction whence they came, beheld a sight that startled them to say the least.

There, about in the center of the well-lighted room, suspended in mid-air by means invisible, was a coffin of regulation size and orthodox shape; somber, mysterious.

"What ther mischief d'ye make o' that?" demanded the mayor of the young city, Anthony Pitts by name, better known as "Mad Anthony."

"Durn me ef I know what ter make of et, Mad Anthony," somebody responded, in tone of alarm.

"It is some trick, that's what it is," cried Joseph Mainard, the proprietor of the Lullaby Roost. "Don't you see; it is only a shadow!"

True enough; now that they looked more closely they could discern objects through the heavy, pall-like spot, but this only served to add to the mystery and to the terror of the superstitious.

Mad Anthony, the mayor, tall, broad and full-bearded, with hat set back upon his forehead and left hand thrust into the pocket of his jacket, where he usually carried it, strode forward and thrust his right arm into the shadowed space, while the crowd looked on.

Immediately, and seemingly from the shadow-coffin itself, was heard a groan, and even the face of the iron-nerved mayor paled slightly.

What did it mean?

A crowd quickly pressed around, all eager

to see and hear, but the mayor and Joseph Mainard were the only ones who had ventured to go very close to the mysterious shadow.

Many a person in the crowd rubbed his eyes, or hers, to make sure of being wide awake, and that the shadow-coffin was no illusion. But, that was needless, for the object was too plainly visible to all to admit of any mistake. There it was, as we have described it.

"Wull, I ber durn!" cried the mayor, withdrawing his arm into the light and stepping back a pace.

"This joke has been carried far enough, Mr. Joker," spoke loudly the proprietor of the place. "A pretty good trick, we have to admit; but, enough of it, if you please!"

This brought forth another groan from the shadowy shape.

Both the mayor and Mainard fell back another step, looking at each other, and the crowd widened the space around the shadow-coffin perceptibly.

The saloon of the Lullaby Roost had never witnessed anything like this. The room became so still that nothing was heard save the steady roar of the falls. The electric lights seemed to make everything ghostly.

All eyes were upon the coffin, and not more than half a minute had elapsed since it was first discovered.

Even while they looked, a change seemed to take place.

Certain outlines of the coffin appeared to grow darker, while others assumed a lighter aspect.

Then, suddenly, exclamations broke from the lips of all, as the form of a body took shape within in the dark outlines, and with cries of terror most of the women fled with fright.

"Enough of this farce!" cried the proprietor, loudly.

"Durn me ef I know whether et's a joke or not," said the mayor, just loud enough for Mainard to hear.

"You don't? I thought you had a harder head than that, Mad Anthony."

"It is mighty spooky, you'll allow."

Whisperings were going on upon every hand, and any number of fingers were pointed at the coffin, which every moment seemed to grow more and more distinct while they looked upon it.

"Ther place is ha'nted," one man declared.

"That's what et aire," another.

"Enough fer me."

"Are you all fools?" cried the proprietor, who did not care to have such a report as that get out. "Are you all fools, I say? I tell you it is some trick!"

"Then, mebby you will kindly explain what ther trick is."

"I will explain something to the miserable trickster, when I find out who he is."

Something more than a minute had now passed, and the shadow object was becoming startling in its distinctness. It was becoming a perfect picture in black and white.

The coffin outlines were almost like ebony, in hue, while the figure within was white as ivory from head to feet! It was the figure of a man, but there was something over the face so that it could not be seen. Everything in the room looked ghostly—ghastly.

And even yet the coffin was spectral; objects could be seen through it.

The mayor and the proprietor were whispering together, excitedly, and with everybody else the excitement was reaching a high pitch.

Suddenly, above every other sound, a voice called out:

"Behold!"

None could tell whence it came, but there was no mistaking the word, and the shadow-coffin riveted attention.

The something that was over the face of the seeming corpse in the coffin was slow-

ly drawn aside, and when the dead face was revealed a cry burst from the crowd, a cry of terror.

The face was that of Joseph Mainard, cold and white in death.

That man reeled backward as if he had received a blow, pressing one hand to his forehead while with the other he seemed as if trying to motion the dread object away.

"Behold!"

Once again, above other sounds, that mysterious voice called out, but the crowd needed no urging.

They could not have removed their eyes from the shadow-coffin if they would, nor from the man whose double, or self, seemed actually to be contained therein. They were chained.

"My God!" gasped Mainard, clutching at a table for support.

"It was my merited doom," came a voice from the shadow-coffin, in deep, sepulchral accents. "Behold, the wages of sin!"

With a hollow groan, Joseph Mainard fell to the floor, and immediately the shadow-coffin began to fade rapidly away. The spectral aspect began to disappear from the room, and in a few seconds everything was as it had been before.

A loud, general sigh of relief broke from the crowd, and the hum and buzz of excited talk began, but it was quickly interrupted, for just at that moment a stranger entered the place, who, looking around for a second or two, hailed the crowd with a loud, cheery salute; but in the same moment he seemed to realize that something out of the usual was on the tapis, and he advanced toward the center of the room.

CHAPTER II.

CENTER-FIRE, THE STRANGER.

THE new-comer was a man worthy of passing notice.

About thirty years of age, or even younger than that, he was an almost perfect specimen of physical manhood.

Good-looking, he had piercing, magnetic black eyes, a black mustache, and his dark hair fell in a rich cluster upon his broad shoulders. He was about the medium in height.

He was clad after the manner of the usual Wild West sport.

With a handsome negligee silk shirt he wore a splendid tie loosely knotted and held with a pin.

His boots were of splendid fit, and became him well. His hat was a broad-brimmed felt of fine quality, and his feet were incased in patent leathers.

Every eye was upon him as he advanced into the room.

"What's up, citizens?" he asked.

"Who are you?" demanded Mayor Pitts, gruffly.

"Why, I am something of a sport, coming and going at will," was the easy rejoinder.

"Oh! you aire?"

"Yes."

"And mebby you had something ter do with this business."

"You give me credit for more than is due me, sir. The fact is, I do not know what has been going on."

"Well, ther deuce has been to pay, that's what."

"Somebody been getting a pill?"

"Do you mean ter say that you don't know nothin' about et?"

"Must I swear to it? Is this man dead?" indicating the proprietor, who still lay on the floor.

"No, he ain't dead; only fainted."

"Fainted?" and the stranger showed some surprise, for Joseph Mainard did not look like a man given to fainting.

"See hyer, what's your name?" the mayor demanded.

"My name, sir, is Edgar Vandorn-brecker—"

"Great Scott!"

"What's the matter?"

"Is that the shortest you've got?"

"Sometimes I'm called Center-fire, the Self-cocker, sir."

"Lord Harry! That is almost as bad as the first, only it's easier to remember."

"Yes, I think so myself."

Everybody was paying attention, full of interest.

In your western town, people live by excitement, almost, and with each new cause the last is forgotten, or nearly so.

"And why the deuce are you called that aire?" demanded the mayor. "Come, you might jest as well interdoose yerself in full, while ye are about et, stranger, an' be done with et!"

"Well, you are piling it right on, sir, and no mistake. But, I have no objection to complying with your request. I am called Center-fire, because that's where I'm set to hit, every time; and the Self-cocker, because I lose no time in getting down to business when occasion requires."

"You seem to have a good opinion of yourself, a mighty good opinion of yourself."

"No; I merely give you the information you ask for. And, now that I have answered your questions, maybe you are ready to answer mine. That will be no more than fair."

"Your question? What did you ask me?"

"I inquired what has been going on here?"

"Oh, yes, so ye did, that's ther fact. Ef you had been hyer you would know what was goin' on."

"It would be a strange thing if I didn't, that's true. But, the man is coming to, I see, and maybe he will have no objection to telling about it. I am interested, I assure you."

Willing hands had by this time given help to Mainard, and he now opened his eyes and looked around.

The moment he recalled what had happened, the expression of his face told it.

A look of terror appeared, and he shivered.

The crowd resumed its busy buzz, and the new-comer was the center of interest, with the mayor and Mainard as secondary figures.

"As ter that," the mayor said, "I ain't got no objections to that, myself, only I wanted ter make sure that ye didn't know already; and I ain't satisfied on that head yet."

Mainard was getting upon his feet.

"Then you can't accept my word for it?" asked the stranger.

"Your word is all right, but you don't back et up with proof. You 'peared on ther scene mighty soon after et happened."

"And still you keep me in the dark concerning what has happened."

"Et was a ghost-coffin," some fellow called out.

"A ghost-coffin? That is something out of the usual, I should say. I am sorry that I was not here a little sooner to see it."

"Who is this man?" asked Mainard, of the mayor.

"You know him as well as I do," was the response. "Says his name is Center-fire."

"And had you anything to do with that low trick, sir?"

"I have had nothing to do with any trick, gentlemen," now with a certain ring of sternness in his tone. "Since I am the object of your suspicion, I demand to know what has happened here."

All the suaveness was gone, now, and the crowd beheld the stranger in a new light.

There seemed to be a little of the tiger in his nature.

"Well, we'll tell ye what happened," spoke up the mayor, taking it out of the hands of the proprietor. "There was a ghost-coffin seen a few minutes ago, same as you jest now hearn tell, and inside of that coffin was ther dead body of Mr. Mainard here, ther sight of which sort o' knocked him out o' time."

"And you think that I had something to do with it, eh?"

"It looked so."

"Well, I hadn't, so please set your minds right as to that. And you think it was a trick, do you, Mr. Mainard?"

"Of course it was a trick!" cried the proprietor of the place. "What else do you think it could have been? It was some manner of optical illusion; but, it was a shock to my nerves all the same."

"I'm mighty sorry that I wasn't here to see it, gentlemen. I have a liking for anything that smacks of the mysterious, and I would have made an effort to solve the riddle if I had been on hand. Even as it is, I would like to hear all the particulars of it."

"Come, let me have a talk with you, my man," invited Mainard. "I'll tell you the whole story."

"That is to my liking, sir."

The proprietor of the hotel conducted the stranger into a little inclosure that marked the hotel office.

The clerk was there, but Mainard dismissed him for a time and invited the stranger to be seated, taking the clerk's place himself for the time being, so that they could be alone.

"You smoke?" he asked.

"Yes, that is one of my vices, sir," the response.

The proprietor extended a box of cigars, and Center-fire took one of the weeds and lighted it.

"You say you like to solve the mysterious?" questioned Mainard, then.

"Yes, when it is anything that can be solved."

"Then, you are something of a detective?"

"Might be called an amateur."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, young man."

Mainard himself was a man about fifty years of age, judging him by his looks.

"And what is that?"

"You find out the person who played that trick on me, and point him out to me, and I'll give you five hundred dollars, spot cash!"

"But, can you be certain that it was a trick, sir?" questioned Center-fire. "I have known of some mighty mysterious things in my time, and maybe this was something on the supernatural order."

Again the face of the hotel proprietor paled, slightly, but the sport saw him set his jaws hard and knew that he was determined to let nothing overcome him as he had been overcome the first time. He told the story of what had happened, about as known to the reader.

CHAPTER III.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE SHADOW.

THEY spent about half an hour together.

When they reappeared in the main saloon, at the end of that time, everything had reassumed its normal conditions.

Music and dancing were in order, and all the games of the evening were in full operation. Gambling was a legitimate business, and was carried on in plain sight of all.

Of course, the strange event was still talked about among the idlers, but it was something that had now passed into history.

The leading game of the room was the faro-bank.

Center-fire and Joseph Mainard parted company, soon after coming out of the little inclosure.

The sport sauntered around the room, and

finally found himself near the faro-table, at the end of which was a vacant seat into which he dropped, at first making no motion to play.

"Make your play, gentlemen!"

The others did so, but not the sport, who seemed to be thinking.

"Are you coming into the game, sir?" asked the dealer. "You, I mean, sir," to the sport direct.

"Beg your pardon; was thinking about something else, just then," responded the sport.

"The chairs are for players, only, sir."

"That being the case, I'll be a player. Give me some bones, if you please, and see how gracefully I can lose them."

He handed over some money with a careless air, receiving chips in exchange, some of which he placed on one of the cards near him, and the game continued, but without excitement.

While Center-fire was playing, the mayor of the camp came and stood just at his right, looking on.

He had been there but a few moments when a queer-looking character approached the table.

He looked something of a cross between a preacher and a horse-thief.

Beginning at the bottom, in description of him, he stood in a pair of rough, stogy boots.

Then came a great stretch of long frock-coat, open in front and disclosing the fact that its wearer had on no vest, but only a red shirt, and that without a tie.

He was capped off with a coarse slouch hat, black, like his coat, and he had chin-whiskers and long, straight hair. He was rather long and lanky in his physical make-up, and any one would have judged him to be fifty years old.

Coming straight to the table, he rested his fingers upon it, rolled his eyes to the ceiling, and in a loud voice admonished:

"Ungodly sons, desist!"

All the players, and all who stood near, looked at him in amazement.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Lacy Mulvern, the dealer at the game. "I guess you are in the wrong pew, old man."

"Nay, nay, this is my place, misguided mortals. Let me prevail upon you to close this nefarious business at once, never more to open it. Know ye not that this is the broad highway that leadeth—"

"This is no place for a sermon, old sanctimonious," interrupted Mulvern. "We deal in goods of another kind, here. Get out of my way, please, for you are interrupting the game. You had better reserve your remarks for the women and children, on Sunday."

By this time quite a group had gathered round, and the attention of the whole room was being drawn that way.

"Will you not heed the admonition? Will you not—"

"And will you not get out of the way? Come, now, old man, don't let us have any trouble about this matter."

"That is what I am most eager to avoid, misguided son. I call upon you to close this game in peace, and take with you my blessing. There are other occupations in life far better—"

"There, now, that will do; stop right where you are."

Mulvern pushed back his chair a little, and made ready to get upon his feet, seeing which, the old fellow stepped back a pace.

"You refuse?" he asked.

"Certainly I refuse," cried Mulvern.

"You will not heed my appeal and close the game?"

"What do you take me for? Do you think we are fools here?"

"And it will be useless for me to make further appeal to your finer—"

"It will be useless for you to say another—"

word along that line, old sorrel. Gambling is legal, here, whether you know it or not, and we have just the same rights as the man next door has to sell flour and salt."

"And nothing that I can say will induce—"

"You have said too much already."

"You still persist—"

"See here! Get away from here, will you?"

By this time every eye in the room was fixed in that direction, and a great crowd stood around the faro-table.

As he uttered the words last quoted, Lacy Mulvern shoved back his chair with his legs and leaped up, and he pointed at the strange-looking man, face stern and eyes flashing.

"Then it is no use for me to try further—"

"Will you go?"

"Persuasion will have no effect—"

"Hang it! must I use force with you, after all?"

"No, no!" cried the old fellow, holding up both his hands, palms outward; "it is not necessary, not necessary at all. Since I cannot persuade you, since you will not heed admonition, since force of logic would evidently be lost upon you—give me a hundred dollars' worth of chips!"

The laugh that broke from the crowd was hearty.

As he said this, the old fellow reached for a chair and drew it up and sat down.

And not only sat he down, but he produced some money and counted out the sum he had named and shoved it across the board.

The saloon of the Lullaby Roost seemed to be having its full share of excitement this evening, if not indeed an unusual supply. What would be next on the tapis?

Center-fire, the sport, laughed as heartily as any one at the old man's sudden and strange change of tactics.

"What can't be cured must be endured, eh, old man?" he remarked.

"Where argument availeth nothing, force must be brought to bear," was the sober response.

"Force?"

"I can think of no better word, off-hand."

"And still I fail to understand you, sir."

"What I mean is, where persuasion cannot accomplish its object, other means must be used."

"I am still in the dark, sir."

"What I mean is this, then: Since I could not prevail upon this misguided young man to close his game from choice, I must compel him to close it of necessity. I will break his bank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mulvern, the crowd joining him. "That is about the richest I ever heard, old man!"

"I hope your bank is the same, sir."

"I think you will find it too rich for your blood."

"We'll see about that, later on. Let the juggernaut roll along."

As he said this, the old fellow put his whole quantum of chips upon a single card, interlocking his fingers across his breast while he awaited the result of the play.

His card presently came out, and—he had won!

Again he played, putting the whole amount upon another card, and again he won!

The dealer looked concerned, and Center-fire eyed the stranger with interest. He had considered himself something of a player at this game.

Some of the players who had not been meeting with success, now placed their stakes with those of the "Old Saint," as some one had dubbed the man.

"That is right," the old fellow welcomed this move. "The bigger we make it the sooner will my object be accomplished."

Well may you look concerned, Mr. Dealer; you are bucking against fate—and Jacob Mundy."

Whether the man would have succeeded in his expressed object or not, cannot be told, for about that time another excitement arose, and one so great that all playing for that night, in the saloon of the Lullaby Roost at any rate, came to an abrupt termination.

A murder had been committed, by some person unknown, and the victim was no other than Joseph Mainard!

CHAPTER IV.

COMPLICATIONS CREEPING IN.

THE discoverer of the crime was one Dudley McGluken.

Dudley was a jovial, good-looking young Irishman, with a splendid mustache of which he was proud, and curly red-hair.

He was popularly known as "Birdie."

With a weakness for the girls and dancing, he had just finished a set on the floor and was escorting his partner to a seat, when he saw that something was wrong with Mainard.

He sprang to his side, and immediately a cry of alarm drew all attention in that direction.

"What is it, Birdie?" was eagerly asked.

"Phwat is it, indade!" was the cry.

"Misther Mainard has been murdered!"

Men sprang to the spot immediately, and it took but a glance to confirm the terrible report.

The proprietor of the hotel was sitting in a chair, in an accustomed place a little in the shadow out of the glare of the electric lights, a look of horror on his face and his eyes fixed in death.

McGluken had torn open the man's vest, and the front of his shirt was red with his life's blood.

The whole company stood appalled.

"Who can have done it?" cried one Charlie Bachert.

"D'ye moind dhe shadow-coffin!" exclaimed McGluken, with accent of terror.

"That was no trick, Birdie, sure as you are born."

"Dhat same it was not, dhen. Oi was shure it was some koind av a banshee, dhe minute Oi saw it, so Oi was."

"And you remember the words the man in the coffin said?" queried "Posey" Glover, the girl with whom McGluken had just been dancing, who had been one of the few women not to run away from the sight.

The attention of the whole room was now centered there.

Mayor Pitts, Center-fire, a sport named John Klein who had sat next to Center-fire at the faro-table, and others, had pushed their way to the front.

With them was the queer-looking stranger who had given his name as Jacob Mundy, and who had been dubbed "Old Saint."

"What's that?" eagerly inquired the Self-cocker Sport, picking up the remark of Posey Glover. "That was something I did not hear, that the figure in the coffin said something."

"Didn't Mainard tell ye?" asked the mayor.

"No."

"That was queer; must have been something in it, after all."

"Well, I should say so, by the looks of this," agreed the Self-cocker Sport, grimly.

"But, what was said?"

"Hang me ef I kin remember the words exact—"

"I can, Mr. Pitts," interrupted Posey.

"Then you tell et, gal."

"What the man in the coffin said was this: 'It was my merited doom. Behold, the wages of sin!'"

The Self-cocker Sport gave a low whistle.

"I did not hear that part of it," he said.

"What did Mainard tell ye, then?" asked the mayor.

"Everything else, I imagine."

"And what did he want you to do?"

"He desired me to find out who it was had played him the trick—for such he considered it."

"Well, ef et was, this is a worse one, that's a sure thing."

"No discounting that fact, sir."

Others had taken up the body and laid it on a table, and a doctor was making an examination.

"Is he sure-enough dead?" inquired Mad Anthony.

"Couldn't be any deader," was the reply.

"The knife went straight to the spot, and death was instantaneous."

"And who can ha' done et? This hyer is somethin' that has got ter be looked into, I ruther opine. Men o' Roarin' River," raising his voice, "did any one see this hyer deed done?"

No one answered.

"Did anybody see any one near ther landlord fore he was found dead?"

It seemed that no one had, since there was still no response, and the mayor proceeded to question still further.

"Wal, who was ther last man that seen ther landlord alive?" he demanded.

Still no response.

"Come, we have got ter git at this thing," Mad Anthony urged. "Somebody was ther last man that talked with him, an' we must get a startin' p'int."

"I saw him come this way, when he left the office there with me some little time ago," spoke up the Self-cocker Sport.

"I spoke t' him myself, just after that," said the mayor.

"And Oi know he was aloive when dhat last set wint on dhe flure," declared McGluken.

"How do you know it, Birdie?"

"Because, he spoke to me."

"What did he say?"

"He sez, sez he, 'Ye are still at it, are ye, Birdie? And Oi sez, sez Oi, 'Dhat same Oi am, Misther Mainard; Oi woud dance dhe two legs aff me fur dhe sake av dancin' wid Posey Glover.'"

"That has no bearing on the case, further than to show the one fact that the murder was committed after that time," remarked the Center fire Sport.

"And how are we goin' to get any closter to et?" demanded the mayor.

"Did any one see him alive after that?" asked the sport.

No one responded.

"Don't be afraid to speak out," the stranger urged. "We must get the truth out of this if we can."

"That's what's the matter," said John Klein, the other sport mentioned. "If you will take hold of it, Center-fire, I will help all I can."

"It is every man's duty to take hold of it," declared the new-comer.

"You may count me in, for all I'm worth," spoke up Jacob Mundy, or "Old Saint" so-called.

"Look hyer," cried the mayor, turning suddenly full upon him, struck with a new thought, and forcibly: "Had you anything to do with this crime?"

"Me!" in greatest amaze.

"Yes, you! That jest kem to me, when you spoke."

"Why, my good sir, was I not at that card table when the thing happened?"

"Yes, I know ye was, and that's jest the p'int. Mebbly you got up that excitement a-purpose to draw tention—"

"My good, sir, I must protest. This is rank injustice. By what stretch of the imagination you can make such a charge, is a puzzle to me. My mission is one of reform—"

"You are a rank old hypocrite!"

"Nay, nay, brother, you have no grounds for such a charge as that."

"Don't you brother me; I wouldn't own ye! Didn't you take a hand in ther game ye was condemnin'?"

"That is true; but, the end justified the means. I intended to break the bank and give the proceeds to charity. The dealer would not accede to—"

"Where's what ye won? How about charity wi' that?"

"Charity begins at home, sir!"

In spite of the awful moment, this sally elicited a laugh, which only served to incense Mad Anthony.

"Men of Roarin' River," the mayor called out, "I ain't satisfied with this hyer galoot, and as mayor of this camp I order his arrest till we have time ter sift this thing!"

Here was excitement.

"I protest! I protest!" cried the long-coated stranger. "There is no sense in such an arrest. Upon what grounds is it ordered, sir?"

"On ther grounds that I have a suspicion that you ain't straight; that is what grounds. When you made that 'citement at ther table, then was a bully chance fer this deed ter be done—"

"That's so, Mad Anthony!" voices interrupted, and hands seized the stranger.

"And am I the only stranger in your camp to-night?" the prisoner demanded. "Was that excitement the first that has been experienced?"

At this, glances were cast at Center-fire, the Self-cocker Sport, but he boldly met every eye.

"If I must be arrested, I demand justice," the long-coated stranger went on. "If there are other strangers in this place to-night, arrest them all, or let me go free. Treat all alike, Sir Mayor."

Still more menacing glances were cast at Center-fire.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET SHOT. COMMOTION.

"WHAT have ye got ter say fer yerself, young man?" asked the mayor.

"This is the second time suspicion has been pointed toward me," responded the Self-cocker Sport.

"An' the more's the reason why you should have somethin' ter say. Thar is hoss sense in what this sanctimonious old hypocrite has offered. Not that I'm against ye."

"You are not far short of it, sir."

"Wull, what d'ye say?"

"All I can say is this: I am innocent of everything concerning the events of this night here."

"And the same say I," chimed in the long-coated stranger. "All I want is a fair chance, and equal justice done. If you arrest me, arrest other strangers as well. Isn't that about right?"

"Let's look at this thing a minute," proposed the Self-cocker Sport.

"Wull?" said the mayor.

"Mr. Mainard himself held me to be innocent of any part in that coffin trick, and engaged me to try to find out something about that. It was my intention to do so. Now that the mystery has doubled, I am more than ever eager to sift it to the bottom."

"What has that got ter do with et?"

"You want this matter explained, don't you?"

"You can bet your life that we are goin' to have et explained!"

"Well, I stand ready to lend you all the aid in my power. Does that look as if I am guilty of any share in it?"

"My own stand exactly," cried the Old Saint. "I am willing to do all I can to bring about the punishment of the guilty one. Release me, and see if I am not as good as my word."

By this time a part of the crowd was beginning to show a vengeful spirit, and the news had reached the outside.

Mainard had been a popular man, in his way, and had had many followers.

One man somewhere in the throng called out:

"Hang 'em both, an' then you'll be sure to get the right one! Ther death of Joseph Mainard has got ter be 'venged!'"

"That is ther right talk!" echoed another. "Make prisoners of 'em both, anyhow!"

"And let the real murderer escape while your are fooling away time in this fashion," sneered the Self-cocker Sport.

"We will be makin' sure of two suspects, anyhow," the unseen first speaker made rejoinder.

"Well, you must not attempt to arrest me, that's all."

"What's that?"

"You heard what I said."

"See hyer, what do you kalkylate ter do?" asked the mayor.

"I am innocent of any share in these matters, Mr. Mayor, and I shall resist arrest if it is attempted."

"Ther deuce ye will! Men, make sure of him, too. I begin ter have a sneakin' suspicion that these two fellers ar' into this thing together, and it is our business to find out!"

Several men sprung forward to obey the mayor's command.

Before anybody could realize what was taking place, three or four of them had tumbled over.

And with such force had they tumbled, too, that they carried to the floor with them several others with whom they had collided in the act of falling.

The sport's fists had done it.

Having cleared the space immediately around himself, the young athlete gave a leap and was upon a table, and in his hands he held a pair of glittering guns, with which he promptly covered the crowd.

"I gave you warning!" the sport exclaimed. "Does anybody else want to make me prisoner?"

The mayor, as everybody else, was looking at the man in amazement.

"Durn me ef he ain't a self-cocker fer a fact!"

So one fellow expressed it.

"I can generally take care of myself in a scrimmage," was the cool response.

"What are you going to do about it, Mr. Mayor?"

"What do you mean ter do with them 'ar guns?" demanded Mad Anthony.

"I'll play some music with them, if you want it that way. I am not going to be taken prisoner, so don't make any mistake about it. If you try it on, somebody is going to get hurt."

"And what ef we let ye off?"

"In that case, I am going to try to solve this mystery for you."

"Mad Anthony, I think you have made a mistake here," now spoke up John Klein, the sport.

"How is that, John?"

Klein was a cool, level headed fellow, as every one knew.

"We know that this gentleman did not commit the crime himself, for he was at Lacy Mulvern's table when it took place."

"Me too!" cried out the Old Saint.

"Yes, you too," admitted Klein. "We know that neither of you did the deed."

"Then, what would you do about et?" asked the mayor, who had some respect for John Klein's opinion in matters.

"I would let them go, and we will get down to business and try to put the crime where it belongs. It seems to me that is the right view to take of it. We have no proofs."

"That suits me," cried the Old Saint.

"Well, it only half-suits me," declared the

mayor. "Self-cocker Sport, you kin go free, but we'll hold this one till ther thing is settled."

"Greatly obliged to you," said Center-fire, with something of a tinge of sarcasm in disguise. "You are accepting the situation just as it stands, which is a very sensible thing to do."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Just what I say, sir."

"If you hold me you must hold him," complained the Old Saint.

By this time there was a great mob outside the doors, and the room was packed with people.

The roar of the many voices almost equalled that of the falls, and many of the hot-headed ones were eager that somebody should hang forthwith.

Seeing Center-fire, the Self-cocker, on the table, with his weapons in hand, it got noised that he was the man who had killed Mainard, and from the front part of the room a cry for his life went up.

"You will find that I am running this thing my own way," Mad Anthony made response to Jacob Mundy. "You are my prisoner, fer the time bein'."

"And you will have to show your authority, sir, or there is going to be some trouble," apprised Center-fire.

"How is that?"

"Don't you hear? They are beginning to howl for somebody to hang."

"Then you jest tell 'em to stop their howlin' an' that I say so; we have got a prisoner and know whatter do with him."

His reason for delegating this to a stranger was, no doubt, because the man was in a commanding position on a table, while he himself was with the general throng.

Center-fire raised both his arms, weapons still in them, and motioned for the crowd to become silent.

"Men of Roaring River," he spoke as loudly as he could, to make himself heard plainly, "there is no call for any rash work here. Your mayor has made an arrest, but there is no proof against the prisoner as yet—"

"You ar' the galoot we want," sung out one fellow.

"Well, my man, maybe you would like to come and take me," the Self-cocker invited.

"Nothing can be gained by rashness, let me tell you, and you may make a serious mistake. Let us go slow in this matter, and I pledge you my word that I will do all in my power to aid in finding out the murderer."

Barely had he ceased speaking, when the report of a pistol was heard from a distant corner.

The Center-fire Sport reeled and fell from the table, shot.

Ready hands caught him as he came down, and the next moment Mad Anthony leaped upon the same table.

"That was a cowardly thing ter do!" he shouted, at the same time pulling a gun from his hip pocket. "Let ther man what done et show his head, an' see how durn quick I'll plunk him!"

He looked in the direction whence the shot had come, but could not, of course, single out the man who fired it, and while he was inquiring if any one knew who had done it, there arose a great commotion on the outside. There was a rattle of revolvers, and the mad yelling of scores of men.

CHAPTER VI.

CENTER-FIRE SHOWS HIS HAND.

For a moment all action within the saloon ceased.

Then there arose a shout, and all in the forward part of the big room made a break for the doors.

"Ther two mines aire at et again!" was the shout.

And out they went, despite the fact that

bullets were flying and there was a fair chance that somebody would put himself in position to stop one of them.

Mayor Pitts leaped down from the table and turned to where several men were caring for the Self-cocker Sport.

John Klein was the principal of these.

"Is he dead, John?" the mayor asked.

"No; he got a blunt on the head, but it was a close call," was the response. "It was the leather band of his hat that saved him, nothing else in the world. I would like to know who it was fired at him, for I rather like the stranger."

"You think he is square?"

"I know he is."

"How d'ye know?"

The sport whispered a word in the mayor's ear.

"The deuce ye say!" the mayor exclaimed. "Hold fast to that other prisoner, boycees, and lodge him safe in the calaboose."

"You have no right to do that," protested the prisoner.

"The deuce I haven't!"

"I mean no right in justice, sir. There is no more against me than there is against this other man."

"There is the fact that the murder was done while you was makin' that 'citement at Lacy Mulvern's game, and that makes it look 'spicious against you. We'll take care of you, anyhow."

"Sir, I protest, I protest! Give me—"

"Take him off," the mayor shouted. "Lock him up, and see that he stays thar till we have time ter deal with him."

"But, I am innocent, sir; I am—"

"Yes, tell all ther boys there is no proof against him yet," shouted the mayor. "But all the same hold fast to him."

The long-coated stranger was dragged away, shouting his protests, and the mayor turned his attention again to the Self-cocker Sport, with whom John Klein was still busy.

The noise outside was still kept up, but the firing was not so close by as it had been at first.

Some of those whom the Self-cocker had knocked over were attending to their injured eyes and noses, and one fellow declared he thought a mule had kicked him.

"I don't wonder at et," declared the mayor. "We didn't know jest how bad et was loaded; hey, Klein?"

"That's what's the matter," the home sport agreed.

"Is he comin'-to?"

"Yes."

In another moment the Self-cocker Sport opened his eyes.

For a few seconds he appeared dazed, and then he raised his hand and felt of his head.

"Did I get it bad?" he asked.

"Not as bad as you came mighty near getting it," answered Klein.

"How long have I been on my back?"

"Maybe two or three minutes."

"Oh, that is not much of a loss, then. But where is the Old Saint? Did you let him go?"

"You can bet your life we didn't!"

"Just as well," as he made an effort and got up, staggering a little at first. "I have a suspicion something like your own, that everything is not square with him."

"Yes, and I beg your pardon fer thinkin' you was in et."

The Self-cocker Sport looked at the mayor sharply, and from him to Klein, who gave a quiet signal for him to say nothing.

"I want to speak with you in private, gentlemen," Center-fire said.

"All right; we can step right here."

"Where is all the crowd?"

"Gone ter see ther fight."

"Fight?"

"Yes; thar's another battle on between ther two mines."

"Then you have some mine-rivalry here, have you?"

"Well, you can bet hard that we have!"

This was said in a way to give the impression that it was a matter of no slight importance.

They had now drawn aside from the others, and the stranger said:

"I suspect that you know more about me now than you did before this mishap, gentlemen."

"Wull, ruther," drawled the mayor.

"We know who you are, sir," averred Klein.

"That's what I thought. Do any others know?"

"Not another one, I guess."

"And you will keep it still?"

"That's what we will," the mayor promised, speaking for both.

"You see," said the Self-cocker, "I am here on business, and it might not be well to let it be known that I am Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Ef I had knowed et, thar wouldn't been any sech fool work on my part, sir," said the mayor, humbly.

"That was all right, as it stood at the time of it," admitted Dick. "I'm sorry I had to topple over some of your good men, but there was nothing else I could do."

"Except to be arrested," laughed Klein.

"And that I couldn't allow to happen if I could prevent."

"Right enough."

"But, what is your opin' of ther hull matter?" asked the mayor.

"It is a mystery. I'm sorry I was not on hand to see that wonderful specter-coffin."

"And so am I, too," declared the mayor.

"There is no doubt but Mainard was right in declaring that it was the work of human agency—in fact, we need no one to tell us that; it is evident he had reason to know it."

"You think so?"

"It is plain enough. He withheld from me the words that were spoken, while he engaged me to find out the author of the mischief."

"And what did it all mean?"

"The words give us our only clue."

"And you take it that Mainard had done some crime?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"And now revenge has been had for it."

"That is the way it looks to me, now that we know a little more than we did."

"I reckon you aire about right," put in Ned Anthony. "Anyhow, Mainard is now on ther dead list, ripe fer a funeral."

"But, about this mining war; is Colonel Blondow's mine involved?"

"He is one of the fighters, sir."

"Then it looks as if I would take a hand in that matter, too, before I get done here."

"You came to see Blondow?" asked Klein.

"Yes."

"About that strange case of his?"

"Since you know my secret, through no fault of mine, I will trust you."

"You need not be afeerd ter do so," assured the mayor. "You ar' no stranger to us by reputation, an' we'll stand by ye."

"I take you at your word, then."

"And that's why you are here?"

"That is it; I have come to find Blondow's missing child."

"Well, it is to be hoped you can find him, for the old man has been almost out of his head ever sence the little fellow was missing."

"Has either of you a suspicion?"

"We think the same as Blondow himself—that Tramwell knows something about it."

"But there is no proof?"

"Not a pinch."

"Well, mind that you keep what you have learned, and I'll do what I can toward sifting this newest mystery for you."

Their talk was carried on for a few moments, when they parted company, the mayor turning to give his attention to the murdered man and the business of that matter, while Deadwood Dick and John Klein went out upon the street in company.

There was a lively time a little further up the gulch, where the two mining-camps were located, and they bent ther steps in that direction.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REASON FOR THE TROUBLE.

DEADWOOD DICK felt that he had struck a lively town.

As we have said of it, it was a roaring town in more ways than one, and it was certainly a roarer in one way.

Outside the saloon, the falls made such a noise that Dick had to pay close attention to his companion to understand what he said. Klein, however, being used to the roar did not appear to notice it.

"A wonder that noise don't set you crazy," Dick observed.

"We don't notice it," was the response.

"You won't mind it after you have been here a month or so."

"I have no present thought of remaining that long. But, about this mining difficulty; what is it all about? They seem to mean business, I should say."

"You can bet your life they do. I think this will be the final battle."

"Then they have been at it before?"

"Oh, yes."

"And which is in the right?"

"Well, it is my opinion that Blondow is in the right."

"Glad to hear that, since I must throw my weight with him in the matter of his missing boy. What is it about?"

"A piece of ground claimed by both."

"Valuable?"

"Mighty. The best spot in the whole gulch."

"No wonder they both want it, then."

"Not a bit."

"And you say Blondow has the best claim?"

"Yes, so I think. You see, he was the first here, and he took up an old claim that had been abandoned."

"I see."

"The original papers called for three certain lines of certain length running in certain directions, but the fourth was omitted, somehow."

"Bad."

"Yes, but it is to be inferred that it would have been a straight line, like the opposite, thus forming an oblong square, and it seems to me that it was merely the mistake of the man who wrote up the papers."

"Very likely."

"But, along comes Bill Tramwell, and finding this valuable ledge, he stakes out a square that takes it in, but by so doing, one corner of his claim runs away up into Blondow's claim, where the missing line ought to be, and there is the whole thing in a nut-shell."

"It is plain to me that Blondow is in the right."

"That is my opinion, and most of the best men of the camp think the same; but Tramwell has a big following among the rougher element, and he has been able to hold his ground."

"But, you think they are now preparing for the final fight?"

"Yes. Tramwell has prepared to work the ledge, and Blondow swears that he shall not do it."

"And what was the shooting about, think you?"

"Well, I hardly know, for I did not think it would be a fight by night, for that's a bad time for gunning."

Dick laughed

"And what about the missing boy?" he made inquiry.

"Well, there is nothing about it, only that Charlie Blondow has not been seen for nearly a month."

"And on what ground has Tramwell been suspected?"

"On the ground that he is the openly avowed enemy of Colonel Blondow."

"That appears a good reason, but what could he hope to gain by stealing the child?"

"Give it up."

"How old is the boy?"

"About ten years."

"His mother here?"

"Dead."

"I see. Well, I shall try to do what I can in that matter."

"And if you succeed you will have the old man's blessing, if nothing more, for he dotes on the boy."

"Has he no other enemy than Tramwell?"

"Not that I know of, except Tramwell's minions, and they are a hard lot."

"I include them all with Tramwell himself. Well, we are nearing the scene of action; can you get me into Blondow's domain?"

"Yes, I guess so; we'll work around this way."

Klein led the way.

"How shall I introduce you?" he asked.

"Privately, by my right name; but if others are around, then let it be as Center-fire, the Self-cocker."

"And you are a self-cocker, too, by the Lord Harry!"

"I have to be, in my line of work."

They passed all around to the south of the scene of the fight, for shooting was still going on in a desultory manner, and finally came out upon a narrow ledge-trail.

Here suddenly, they were challenged.

"Halt!"

"Here we are, Short," responded Klein.

"Who are ye?"

"John Klein, and a man who must see Blondow at once."

"Thought et was you, Klein; pass right along."

They went forward, and ere long were inside the mine-inclosure, for Blondow had been obliged to close in his mill, etc.

"Where is Colonel Blondow?" asked Klein.

"Right out thar at ther front," answered the man addressed.

"Is he busy?"

"Sounds like et, don't et? He is peggin' lead at Tramwell's cusses over on t'other side."

"Shall we go to the front?" Klein asked.

"Certainly," answered Dick.

They moved on, and ere long were among the defenders behind the stockade fence around the mine.

The mine-owner was soon found.

"You, Klein?" he said.

"Yes, and here is a man to see you, somebody you have been looking for."

"Not Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"The same," assented Dick.

"Thank God!"

The mine owner caught Dick's hand and wrung it.

"But, I am here under another name," announced Dick. "Just as well to remain unknown."

"Better, perhaps. What do you call yourself?"

"Well, I have given my name as Edgar Vandornbrecker, but as nobody is likely to make use of that I have adopted a snappy pseudonym besides—"

"And a dandy!" interrupted Klein.

"What is it?"

"Center-fire, the Self-cocker."

"Well, that is something unique, I'll be bound."

"You seem to be having it lively here, Colonel Blondow."

"Yes, you are right. I am half afraid they mean to attack me and burn me out before morning."

"They have a larger force than you?"

"About twice as big."

"That is bad. You have a good fence here."

"Yes, but it could soon be battered down. We are keeping up a show to hold them in check."

"Mr. Klein has told me about the case. You feel sure that you are in the right, I suppose."

"I know I am in the right, and I mean to fight while I have a leg to stand on, too."

"And I must throw my weight with you."

"I had been praying that you would come."

"We will look over the ground to-morrow, and drive them over the line."

"Drive them! Didn't you just hear me say that they double us in numbers? I am satisfied to hold my own."

"Yes, I said drive them, and that is what I mean. We will use a little strategy as an offset to their superior numbers, and I think we will be able to do them up."

"By heavens, Center-fire, if you can do that for me I will give you a half interest in the mine!"

"Oh, no, I'll serve you for a less reward than that, sir."

CHAPTER VIII.

DEADWOOD DICK'S SUGGESTION.

COLONEL BLONDOW gave some directions to his men.

Having done that, he, Dick, and Klein repaired to the main office for a chat.

"What opened the fight to-night?" asked Dick.

"Why, some of my men were running in a cart load of provisions, preparing for a siege, when they were discovered and attacked."

"Ha!"

"The rest of my men ran out to their help, and there was a lively time for a little while."

"Anybody get hurt?"

"Two of my men got slight wounds; don't know what the result was on the other side."

"And you think if they made an attack to-night they would overcome you, in spite of the fence, do you?"

"That's what I fear."

"I have an idea."

"What is it?"

Dick spoke one word, no more.

"Great Scott!" cried Blondow. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Because it did not happen to come to you, I suppose, sir."

"Say, rather, that I hadn't the inventive mind for it."

"No, the thought did not come to you, that was all. Have you got a supply of pipe?"

"Yes, a big lot of it."

"And how about the other mine?"

"All they have got is in use."

"Excellent! After we gave them the idea, they would play the same trick, if possible, you see."

"But, they can't do it! By heaven, Deadwood Dick, we have got them right where we want them, no mistake!"

"So I think myself. Set a force of men at work and extend the pipe to the fence, and carry a supply there to run it further if necessary."

"It shall be done. Great Scott! we'll be able to flush them clear out of the gulch, if we get a fair shot at them with the water. There is force enough to upset a house!"

Everything was changed in a moment.

That is to say, the prospects on the side of the defenders.

Now they were not only sure of means of

defense, but could carry the war into the camp of the foe, despite numbers against them.

We have described the camp, with the great falls of Roaring River.

The pressure of water for mining purposes, a thousand feet in vertical pipe, was enormous, and the wonder was that it had not been thought of before.

Many a time had the miners seen the finger of water, as it came cracking and snapping from the nozzle of the pipe, hold in abeyance a boulder of many tons' weight until they could escape from under it.

No force of men could stand before it.

The men of the "Royal" were jubilant as soon as this plan was made known to them.

A force was set to work immediately, to carry the pipe to the fence, while the remainder of the men kept up a show of defense with their rifles and revolvers.

Every man had been cautioned not to let the secret out.

Meantime, Klein had returned to the camp center, and Deadwood Dick and Colonel Blondow retired to the office of the Royal for a private talk.

"Well, you came here to attend to the matter I wrote about, of course," the colonel observed.

"Yes, sir, I am here to find your lost boy if I can."

"And God grant that you may succeed."

"I hope it may be so."

"I told you I would give the particulars upon your coming."

"Yes."

"And still there is little to tell. The boy is simply missing, and I know not where he is."

"You have accused this man Tramwell?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say?"

"Merely sneers, demanding to know what he would want of my brat."

"And that is the question: what would he want of the child?"

"I give it up."

"Still you think him guilty."

"He would do anything in his power to injure me."

"You have some other reason for thinking him the abductor, perhaps."

"The fact that the boy did not disappear until after the war opened between us, mainly."

"And you can suspect no one else?"

"No one."

"Who is your heir, after your son?"

"Ha!"

"That opens another view?"

"Strange that I did not look far enough for that."

"Then, there is something in it, you think?"

"No, there is nothing in it, sir. It was the thought that made me exclaim."

"Then, there is no heir?"

"A hundred of them, sir. A host of cousins, and the like. The property I own would not amount to much, divided among them all."

"No possibility of any one nearer than these cousins?"

"No, they come next."

"Then there does not appear to be much in that view of it. You have no other enemy besides this man Tramwell?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Well, tell me about the disappearance of your boy."

"It will be a month in just three days, since it happened."

"A long time, but still he may be found, if living."

"I hope so."

"Well, the particulars?"

"I left him at the house one morning, on coming here to my office, and that was the last seen of him."

"You keep house, then?"
 "Yes."
 "I am told you are a widower?"
 "That is true. I have a trusty house-keeper, however."
 "And what said she?"
 "She said that Charlie had left the house about an hour after I left, saying he was going to the office to see papa."
 The man was nearly overcome while he told about it, proof of the strong affection he had for his boy.
 "Was he in the habit of going anywhere else?"
 "Only to school and home again."
 "He had been cautioned about the falls?"
 "No child is allowed near the falls. Besides, he was afraid of the water."
 "That seems to dispose of that, then."
 "I feel sure that was not his fate."
 "And you have no clue, other than what you have mentioned?"
 "I am afraid that is all I can suggest."
 "This seems to be a town of mystery. You have heard about the affair at the Lullaby Saloon?"
 "Something about it."
 "Strange thing."
 "Yes, if I have got it straight. You intend to take hold of that, too?"
 "I do. Were you well acquainted with Mainard?"
 "Yes."
 "Ever know anything to his discredit?"
 "No more than the average mortal has scored against him, sir."
 "Well, it is plain that he had a foe, and one who desired his life—and has taken it."
 "No disputing that."
 "And the question is, who was that foe? You have never heard him speak of having a particular enemy?"
 "I never have. In fact, he was rather close about his affairs."
 "There is reason to believe that it was a matter of revenge, for some wrong the man had done in the past. But, all that will have to be sifted. I will now take leave, Mr. Blondow. Carry on the work, and meantime I'll scout around a little."
 "It shall be pushed with all haste, rest assured."
 So they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

CENTER-FIRE AND TRAMWELL.

WHEN Center-fire, the Self-cocker, got back into the town proper, he found a change in the appearance of the Lullaby Roost.

Nearly all the lights were out, and the most brilliant spot in the camp had become suddenly the dimmest, out of respect for the dead proprietor.

Just across the street from the Lullaby Saloon, was another called the Rouse-up Ranch, in contradistinction, which was something of a rival to the former, but not so elegant.

With the Lullaby in darkness, however, the Rouse up loomed up resplendent.

Center-fire entered this resort.

He had learned, by the way, that this was the headquarters of Tramwell's bad lot, and, in fact, of Tramwell himself.

The place was thronged, for many who had been forced out of the Lullaby thus early in the evening, had come here to finish the night's amusement, for the death of one citizen was little check upon the populace.

Dick was recognized the moment he entered the door.

Exclamations greeted him.

"Here he is!" was one thing that reached his ears.

"Yes, here I am, citizens, as large as life, and still a-kicking," he cheerily responded.

A man stepped forward toward him.

"You are the sport who kicked up the

rumpus over in the Lullaby awhile ago?" he asked.

"I'm not the man," answered Dick.

"But, they say your are, and if so, I want to scrape acquaintance with you, that is all."

"And whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"William Tramwell, owner of the Prince mine."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Tramwell, but there is a mistake in identity on your part."

"No mistake at all!" some fellow sung out. "He is the galoot!"

Dick looked to find the man, but he was not to be seen.

"That's complimentary, to be called a galoot," he said, laughing.

"Are you not Center fire the Self-cocker, so-called?" demanded Tramwell.

"Yes, that's my handy name, sir."

"Then why are you trying to deny it?"

"You asked me if I was the man who kicked up the fuss in Lullaby, and I said I was not; but, you have got my name all right."

"Then it wasn't you, eh?"

"It was not."

"Well, what do you know about the matter?"

"No more than others who were there, Mr. Tramwell. It is all a mystery to me, as I suppose it is to you."

"And it is a mystery to me, sure enough. I hear that you have expressed a determination to sift the matter, if you can."

"Well, I have said that I would like to get at the mystery."

"Come this way, and let's have a chat."

"Agreeable to me, sir."

Tramwell led the way down the room till he found a place where they could take seats.

When seated, he said:

"Now, I don't know much about you, but if you are anything of a detective I want you to go into this thing to win."

"I don't lay claim to much distinction in that line, sir."

"No matter; maybe you are some good at it."

"Remains to be seen."

"If you can show me the slayer of Joseph Mainard, I will give a thousand dollars."

"Whew!"

"I mean it."

"I presume you do, sir."

"And you will try for it?"

"I will."

"You see, Mainard was my friend, and I want to avenge him."

"Have you any suspicion who killed him?"

"No; it is all a blank to me."

"What do you think about the arrest that has been made?"

"There is not much to hold that old crank upon, seems to me. He must be set free."

"He will have to be, if nothing more than mere suspicion can be brought to bear against him. But, the point taken was a good one."

"I admit it, sir."

"And if it can be shown that he had a confederate here, that will make it look bad for him."

"You are aware that you are looked upon with suspicion?"

"Yes, I am aware of the fact."

"And you resisted arrest, when it was attempted."

"Well, you can bet I did. I am not putting myself in the hands of a mad mob, if I know it."

"That was one point that looked bad for you, for there was no danger, no more than there has been for the fellow who was arrested. And he declares he is innocent, too."

"I have no proof to the contrary."

"Then is it right to hold him?"

"I am not mayor of your town, sir."

"And if I were, that man would be freed."

"You, then, hold him innocent?"

"He must be, until he is proven guilty."

"Well, I know nothing about it. You want me to find out the slayer of Joseph Mainard."

"Exactly, sir."

"Well, I'll undertake it, but I don't promise to succeed. By the way, you are owner of one of these mines that are in batty array against each other, I believe."

"Yes, and almost owner of both of them."

"How is that?"

"My line runs pretty well up into Blondow's supposed possession."

"Yes, I have heard something about it. This seems to be a decidedly lively little camp."

"It is a roarer, you bet! Blondow ran up against the wrong man when he ran up against me, and he'll find it out so, too, before I get done with him, he can bet his whiskers!"

"Then you are in the right, I take it."

"I mean to fight it out, right or wrong. I staked a claim where there were no other lines recorded, and I mean to hold it."

"Well, of course, I know nothing about it, but it looks to me as if that line of Blondow's would naturally run straight across, making a square, and if I were he I would certainly defend it."

"You would?"

"You bet!"

"It would be no use."

"Maybe not, but I would do it just the same."

"And what if you were in my place? What would you do in that case?"

"You want a square answer, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, I would not be in your place. In staking a claim, I would not have passed those corner stakes of Blondow's, even though there was no line across the end."

"You wouldn't?"

"I wouldn't."

"Then you politely tell me that you think he is right and I am wrong."

"That is the way I look at it. You would not have placed your claim in that shape, had it not been for a certain rich ledge, would you?"

"I admit that, certainly. I ran my lines to take in all I could, where other lines did not already stand."

"Disregarding the fact that Blondow's line ought to be there, even if it was not."

"See here, Mr. Center-fire, are you fighting for him?"

"I would be on that side, if either."

"Well, you are mighty cool about it, telling me so to my face, anyhow. What will be your price to join issues with me in this thing?"

"Mr. Tramwell, you can't buy me at any price. When I go into a thing of this kind, it is on the side of the right, every time, and I have told you that I believe you to be in the wrong."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT SCHEME THIS?

A DARK look came into Tramwell's face.

He looked steadily at the Self-cocker Sport for some moments before he spoke again.

"See here; are you on the other side?" he then demanded, abruptly.

"You have heard all I have to say on that head," answered Dick. "Let us drop it and turn to something else."

"What else?"

"You wanted me to aid you in finding the murderer of Joseph Mainard."

"If I cannot have you with me all around,

"I don't want you at all. If you are going in with Blondow, we are enemies."

"You are blunt about it."

"I am as frank about things as you were a moment ago."

"Well, so be it. If I engage with Blondow, I must oppose you, of course. A man cannot serve two masters."

"And why should you serve either, in this case?"

"That's the point."

"You had better keep out of it, and keep your hands clean of the whole affair. It will be better for you."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Does that imply a threat?"

"Not of necessity; take it as you please."

Just then, the mayor of the camp approached them. He had come in a moment before, and had been looking around.

"Hyer ye aire, eh?" he greeted.

"Yes, here I am," answered the Self-cocker Sport.

"Wull, there is the deuce to pay."

"What is it?"

"Some of ther boyees aire a-whoopin' fer your arrest and lodgin' in ther calaboose along with that other cuss."

"That so?"

"Straight as a stick."

"What has set them onto me again?"

"Ye see, that saintly old fraud got one of 'em to take a message to ye, and ther feller gave et away."

"Indeed?"

Tramwell was looking from one to the other, questioningly.

"Is it anything that throws more suspicion upon this man, mayor?" he made inquiry.

"Et might, ef ye looked at et in that light."

"And don't you, then?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because, I consider that other feller a rank old fraud."

"And why have you come and told me this?" asked the sport. And it was something that puzzled him.

"So that you could be on your guard. You have promised to do what you could toward findin' out who et was killed Mainard, and I am in favor of lettin' you have a fair chance."

"But these men you speak of are not, eh?"

"They mean to lodge ye in ther coop, ef they kin do et."

"I'll do my little best to make it interesting for them, if they try it on, that's all."

"So I have told 'em."

"I guess they are coming now."

"So they aire, sure's you're born!"

"And my advice to you is to surrender," said Tramwell.

"No, thank you!"

About a dozen rough-looking fellows entered the saloon in a body, each man of them with a gun in his hand, and they were looking searchingly around.

"Hev ye seen him?" their leader called out.

"Seen who?" asked the man at the bar.

"That cuss what calls himself Cock-of-ther-Walk or somethin' like that."

"Thar he is!" another cried out.

He pointed to where Dick, the mayor and Tramwell were sitting.

With a growl they all made for their prey in a body, and it looked rather dubious for the sport.

He rose up to greet their coming, and was as cool as ice.

"You want me?" he asked quietly.

"Yas, we wants you!"

"What for do you want me?"

"We ar' goin' ter lock ye up."

"Are you sure about that?"

"We mean ter take ye, or make cold meat of ye, one or t'other."

"Well, that is not very pleasant to think about, truly, but, before you proceed to business, what is all this about?"

"You aire a darn lyin' sneak, that's what et's about."

"Mistaken, gentlemen."

"We have proof of et?"

"An' what is your proof?"

"Didn't that cuss in ther calaboose try ter git Jack hyer to fetch a message to ye?"

"What of that? What was the message?"

"Why, he said as long as ye were both suspected, he thought it would be better fer you to give up an' join him in ther jail, when there might be a show to escape by workin' together."

"And you have taken stock in that?"

"Durn et! ain't et proof enough?"

"Ask your mayor."

"We don't ask nobody; we have come hyer on business."

"I think ye had better go slow, boys," spoke up the mayor, "I have given this man his liberty—"

"An' you can't run ther hull town, even if you ar' mayor of et! We have ther proof, now, that this man is guilty, an' we mean ter have him!"

"I think the boys are right, mayor," said Tramwell.

Dick saw through it all, or thought he did. But he looked at it in two ways, hardly knowing which was the right explanation.

Perhaps it was a mixture of both. Jacob Mundy and Tramwell might be working together against him. But, he was inclined to his first thought; that Mundy had had to do with the shadow-coffin and the murder that followed.

If that were so, then it was possible that Mundy feared him, and wanted to make sure of putting him where he could not work out the truth. Perhaps a confederate was the one who had fired at Dick.

"Ef they aire, thar is a better way than this," growled Pitts.

"What is et?" demanded the leader.

"Leave ther man free, and let's see what he will do toward findin' out ther murderer of Mainard."

"An' have him put ther crime onto some feller what never done et a tall!" cried the leader. "Not any, thank ye; we have got onto him, and he has got ter come wi' us."

"What have you got onto?" asked Dick.

"Onto you, that's what. Didn't yer pard ner give Jack a fiver to find you an' give ye that message?"

"Ald would he not be a fool to do that if he and I were really partners in any kind of crooked business? With me free, there would be a better chance for his escape."

"Now et's no use your talkin', you has got ter come with us."

"I have, eh?"

"You bet!"

"Well, begin to take me, will you? You will find that I am not only a self-cocker, but a double back-action knocker-out as well!"

The Self-cocker Sport stepped back a pace and put up his fists.

The leader of the dozen advanced upon him with revolver aimed at his head, and the others stood ready.

Tramwell got out of the way with haste, but the mayor stood his ground and tried to persuade the fellows to desist, but that was now useless. They were bent on making the sport their prisoner.

They would probably have some sport doing it.

CHAPTER XI.

SELF-COCKER'S GRIT.

THE ringleader was one Bullion Bullwhack, so called.

He was about as truly bad a man as the

town of Roaring River could scare up at short notice.

It was his boast that he could whip any two men in the gulch, in a fair fight, and the general impression was that he could do it, too.

If Deadwood Dick had known this, he might have thought the fellow was looking for fight just for the sake of a fight, and for the satisfaction of "doing up" such a sport as himself.

This, however, was not the case; the man's mission was as he declared.

"Begin ter take ye?" Mr. Bullwhack bel-lowed. "Why, you fresh young beauty, I have got ye a'ready."

"Oh! have you?"

Bullion made a reach with his left hand, holding his revolver with his right ready for business.

But his reach was not quite successful. In fact, it was an utter failure, so far as laying hold upon the Self-cocker Sport was concerned.

Dick brushed the arm aside, seized the wrist of the hand that held the revolver, and, to the great surprise of everybody, the great Bullwhack began to howl and dance.

Deadwood Dick's strength of arm was prodigious. Although it was his left hand, he had given the fellow's wrist such a turn that he was almost crazed with pain for a moment, and his revolver dropped to the floor. The others looked on with amazement.

"Have you got me?" demanded the Self-cocker.

"Let go!" was the howl. "Let up! Fer love o' goodness, let up!"

"Have you thought better about running me in?" demanded Dick. "Will you give that up?"

"Go fer him, boys!" yelled Bullion. "Shoot ther cuss like ye would a dog!"

"And hang for it," cried Dick.

"Don't a man of ye dare to shoot," cried the mayor. "Bullion begun et; let him finish et."

"But, he has a good case against the man," declared Tramwell.

"Course I have!"

"And I have got a good grip on you," countered Dick, grimly.

"Let up!"

"Nix!"

"At him, boys!"

"Yes, at him, fellers," echoed he called Jack.

They moved forward all together, evidently bent upon business, now, spite of what they had seen of the prowess of their foe.

"Back!" cried Dick.

He was having a struggle with Bullion, now.

"No, at him!" Bullwhack ordered. "We have got him now, sure!"

He thought he had him himself, but he immediately saw his mistake, in a great manner.

The Self-cocker Sport had merely let go his hold in order to take a better, and he swung the fellow clear off his feet.

Once, twice, he swung him, and the next time he caught the others of the gang with Bullion's legs and heels and sent them toppling over like so many ninepins, depositing Mr. Bullwhack among them.

"You had better run," suggested the mayor.

"Run? What for?"

"You life ain't safe."

"Safe here as anywhere, I guess."

"They will shoot ter kill, now."

"You had better get out of range, then. No use your taking any risks, where you have nothing at stake."

"What d'ye take me fer?"

"A pretty good man."

"Well, I'm good enough to stand by ye in this thing."

"All right; if you will do that we can probably pull through. But, let me chip in alone, first."

"All right."

The men on the floor were squirming and cursing, trying to get upon their feet in all haste.

Most of them had lost their guns in the sudden upset, and were at the same time making a wild scramble to get hold of them, and it looked bad for Deadwood Dick just then.

But, he was Deadwood Dick!

"Get up, you pack of fighting hyenas!" he called out to them. "Get up here, and let me have a little pistol practice at you!"

He had now drawn his own peerless guns.

With the drop on them, he certainly had the advantage for the time being, if no one else chipped in on the sly.

"Yas, we'll git up!" bellowed Bullion Bullwhack. "You will find out that we aire up, you kin bet high that you will! Et means yer life on a limb, now, fer you ar' ther cuss what killed Mainard."

"Thet's what he is!"

"At him!"

"String him up!"

"Give him ther knife!"

They certainly meant business.

And so did Deadwood Dick, as they were likely to discover.

"Hold on, now, unless you have spoken for your long boxes," the Self-cocker called out, bringing his guns up to line. "The first man to lift a gun will get a bit of cold lead!"

There was a grim ring to what he said.

Even Bullion Bullwhack went slow about it, for he had a wholesome regard for his skin.

Just how it might have terminated, cannot be told, for suddenly something occurred to claim all attention, and the men who had come for the sport forgot their errand.

The Rouse-up Ranch, like all other places in the town, was lighted by electricity, and of a sudden the light took on a ghostly aspect.

Those who had been in the Lullaby at the time of the appearing of the coffin, felt a chill, in spite of themselves.

Their eyes sought the center of the room, expecting the same vision again.

Nor were they mistaken in their expectations.

A dark shape was seen.

Bullion Bullwhack and his followers looked at it with mouths open, and Dick had nothing to fear from them for the present.

Exclamations and ejaculations were heard on every hand, and scarcely an arm but was pointing at the dark shape hanging in mid-air, calling the attention of some one else.

"What is all this about?" Dick asked.

"The shadder-coffin again!" exclaimed the mayor.

"Hal is that so?"

"Sure."

"The thing that was seen in the Lullaby?" queried Tramwell. "Is that all it was?"

"You jest wait!" rejoined the mayor.

The shadow was growing darker speedily, and now its outlines could not be mistaken.

There it was, a coffin beyond any chance of mistake, and yet it was only a shadow, for men could see one another, and other objects, through it.

Darker, and yet more dark, it grew.

Then appeared an outline of white, the same as it had been in the other saloon.

Those who had seen it there knew what was coming, and a hush of awe came over the whole crowd. It was a moment of terror to many.

And yet all stood their ground, as if fascinated.

Deadwood Dick paid close attention to every particular, trying to explain the mystery.

He examined the lights around the room,

for if it were a trick he believed that the electric lights were used to produce the effect, somehow, but just how he could not explain.

In fact, he could discover nothing.

Darker grew the outlines, until the coffin was quite black; then the white outlines within grew whiter.

The form of a person was plainly seen, with something over the face, the same as on the other occasion, and the crowd fairly held their breath, some of the men as pale as death.

Then, at length, the same hollow voice saying:

"Behold!"

CHAPTER XII.

TRAMWELL A MARKED MAN.

THE crowd strained to see.

Every eye was fixed upon the shadow-coffin.

They could not have looked away if they would; they were as if bound.

Slowly the cover was removed from over the face of the corpse in the coffin, and the face was disclosed.

An exclamation of horror broke from the crowd, and one man present fairly uttered a scream, turning away and staggering blindly toward the wall.

That man was Bill Tramwell!

The dead face that was revealed in the coffin was his!

"It was my merited doom," came a voice from the shadow apparition. "Behold, the wages of sin!"

Immediately the specter began to fade rapidly away.

The words spoken had been the same on the former occasion in the Lullaby, and they struck terror.

"What infernal trickery is this?" almost screamed Tramwell. "What does it mean, I demand? Who has dared to make me the subject of such a hideous joke?"

"Et will be no joke, ef it turns out the same as it did with Mainard," remarked the mayor. "That was jest what his ghost said, and et wasn't but a few minutes an' he was made ready fer his box."

Tramwell wiped the perspiration from his pallid face.

"I denounce it as a hoax," he cried. "I have done no great sin, and I'm sure Mainard never did. I tell you it is all a hideous joke!"

"There is one thing sure," said Deadwood Dick.

"What's that?" demanded the mayor.

The shadow was now gone, and the lights were the same as they had been.

"It is certain that the Old Saint had nothing to do with it this time, and I can swear that I had no part in it."

"Plain enough," agreed the mayor.

"Et would have been more to ther p'int, ef it had been your cussed mug in ther thing," growled Bullion Bullwhack, addressing the Self-cocker Sport. "You will need a box 'fore Tramwell."

"Maybe I will; who can say?"

"I kin."

"You are so prone to mistakes that there is no dependence to be put in what you say."

"Make no mistake about ther fact that I have got you marked, and that I am goin' ter have 'venge on ye fer what ye have done this night ter me."

"No time like the present, Mister Man. Put up or shut up."

The fellow had had enough, evidently, for he strode muttering away, and his followers with him.

The whole room was in an uproar of excitement, and Tramwell was the center of all attention, every eye being fixed upon him. He was looking around apprehensively in all directions.

"Oi wouldn't be in ynre place fer a farm," declared Birdie McGluken. "And ef Oi

was, Oi would go and hole meself away fer a good spell."

"Be hanged to you!" growled the man. "Think I'm afraid?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Then what are you talking about?"

"Oi am talkin' about phwat Oi would do an' it was mesel'."

"And I'll tell you what I will do," announced Tramwell. "I will give a thousand dollars to the man who will solve this riddle."

"I guess your thousand is safe," said the Self-cocker Sport.

"Then you give it up?"

"No; but it looks as if it was the real thing, and no trick about it. I think if I were in your place I would do as this young man has suggested, go and hole myself away."

The room was in a whirl of excited comment.

Impossible to catch more than the mere drift of it all, for to quote would be to overrun our space.

Tramwell walked off to a corner, eying every one with suspicion as he did so, and he had not recovered his composure, or anything like it. He fairly trembled, as all could see.

"He is hit hard, it seems," remarked Dick to the mayor.

"You are right he is, pard," was the response.

"There must be something in it all."

"You kin bet there is. He will be in it himself, if he don't look out."

"Well, I have struck a lively towu this time, sure enough! I wonder where our friend Klein is?"

"I give it up."

"Hal! here he is, now."

"Speak of the Old Boy, and you have him at hand."

John Klein came in, looking eagerly around, and seeing Dick, advanced rapidly toward him.

"Come with me," he said, hurriedly.

"What's up?" Dick asked.

"I don't know; come along."

"Well, just as you say."

Dick still had a gun in hand, and was on the alert as he followed the local sport out of the room.

He had nodded an adieu to the mayor, giving him a hint to have an eye upon Tramwell for the time, and the mayor had responded by sign that Dick understood.

But, every eye was upon the marked man. It would have been a difficult matter for an assassin to have done him harm and get away unseen.

Tramwell presently got some of his followers around him, and finally left the saloon and set off in the direction of his mine, under their protection.

But, to follow Dick.

"What is it?" he asked of Klein, as soon as they were outside.

"I'll be hanged if I know; there is a mystery on every bush to-night, it seems to me."

"You have heard what just now took place in the saloon here?"

"Yes, yes; and it is wonderful."

"Where are you leading me?"

"To the store of Widow Bachert."

"And who the deuce is she?"

"Mother of Charlie Bachert, whom you saw in the Lullaby."

"Don't remember him."

"No matter; she is a woman who came here about the time this camp began to boom, and started a store."

"Was a widow then?"

"Yes; and Charlie was only a boy."

"Same name as Blondow's missing boy."

"Yes; but nothing in that."

"Maybe not."

"No, nothing in that. Well, this woman has just seen a ghost."

"Seen a ghost?"

"Exactly."

"And what have I got to do with her having seen a ghost?"

"Confound it, nothing; but, you are Deadwood Dick, and as this seems to be a part of the whole mystery, your place is right there."

"How did you learn about it?"

"I happened into the store a minute after she had seen the thing."

"And what was it like? The spooks seem to be abroad to-night, for certain. Was it the shadow-coffin?"

"No; she says it was her dead husband."

"Strange."

"I'll rattle it off to you in few words. I dropped into the store to make a simple purchase, when the woman burst out of the back room with her eyes almost starting out of her head."

"No wonder, if she had seen a ghost."

"I asked her what was the matter, and she excitedly told me she had just seen the ghost of her dead husband, and that he had spoken to her! She wildly cried for her boy Charlie, and urged me to bring him. She had heard, of course, all about the apparition in the saloon, and the death of Mainard, and she feared for her boy."

"I see."

"Well, I pacified her for the moment, as best I could, and urged her not to say a word to any one else and said I would bring Charlie to her just as soon as possible. I found him, and started him, and then I scouted around mighty lively to get on track of you, for the reason that you are the man of all men to take up the matter, if there is anything in it. It is just possible that this belongs to the other case, too. Here we are."

CHAPTER XIII.

ABOUT ANOTHER APPARITION.

DEADWOOD DICK was interested. He had paid close attention to what Klein had said.

They now came to a stop before a little store which Dick had before noticed.

It was a neat little place, with a display of men's goods in the windows, and other light articles.

They entered.

Near the rear of the store stood the mother and son, talking earnestly.

Dick remembered having seen the young man in the Lullaby Saloon, and he noted he looked somewhat concerned.

The woman's face was pale, and she trembled. She looked at Dick in a searching manner, and then at Klein in an inquiring way, and hardly seemed to like his bringing a stranger.

"Mrs. Bachert, this is a friend of mine," said Klein. "Mr. Dickwood, let me introduce you."

Dick had to smile at the odd twist the sport gave his name, but he acknowledged the introduction in a manner that made the woman regard him in a more favorable light immediately.

"I am glad to know you, as Mr. Klein's friend, Mr. Dickwood," the woman said.

"And he tells me you have had a scare."

"More than a scare, sir."

"Will you tell me all about it?"

"What good can that do, sir?"

"I will tell you, Mrs. Bachert," spoke up Klein, quickly. "We have made up our minds to solve the mysteries of this night, if possible, and this may be a part of the whole."

"And even if not," added Dick, "we may be able to clear it up."

"That is impossible, sir."

"Why?"

"How can you hope to explain the mystery of a ghost?"

"I am no believer in ghosts, madam. You saw something tangible, or you saw nothing at all."

"Do you consider me crazy?"

"I do not."

"I saw something plainly enough."

"Then it was real flesh and blood, and it only remains—"

"Real flesh and blood! Why, sir, I could look right through the shadowy form as it stood before me."

"Then it was some illusion, madam."

"Come! Come with me!" and she led the way into the little rear room.

The two men followed her, her son coming after them, looking terrified.

It was a neatly furnished apartment, with a round table in the middle of the floor, on which was a lamp.

By this table was a chair, and on the floor was some sewing, just where the woman had dropped it in her moment of fright on seeing the ghost.

"See!" she said, pointing to the chair. "I was sitting there, sewing, when the light seemed to grow peculiar, and looking up, I saw something like a white shadow, if you ever heard of such a thing, there in the corner."

"My work fell out of my hands, and I sat as if turned to ice, unable to take my eyes off the dread sight. I never had such a feeling in my life. I wonder that I did not fall dead with fear. I was powerless to utter a sound, or to make a motion. Did you ever have nightmare? It was a feeling like that."

"The white shadow grew more and more distinct, as I looked at it, and in a moment I recognized my husband, who has been dead these ten years or more. Can you wonder that I was terrified? Can you believe now that it was a ghost, just as I claim? I cannot be mistaken, for the face was too familiar, the face of the man I loved better than I loved life itself."

"And are you positive as to its being a shadow?"

"I saw that chair right through the shadow, sir, and the figures there on the wall paper."

"No question about that part of it, then. Mr. Klein told me that the apparition spoke to you, too."

"Yes, yes."

"Do you mind telling what was said?"

"Not at all, though I would not want to have my story made public."

"It shall not be, if possible to withhold it."

"You may trust us, Mrs. Bachert," urged Klein.

"I know I can trust you, John."

"And I vouch for my friend."

"It is enough. Not that there is anything that should be a secret, but I am of a shrinking disposition."

"We understand."

"Well, the shadow called me by my name, Eliza, just as Charles used to speak my name, but I was unable to make any response, as I said. I could not even nod my head or move a finger."

"It spoke my name again, and said further: 'At last, the day of vengeance is at hand.'"

"And was that all?" asked Dick.

"He and Klein looked at each other."

"No, that was not all."

"What more?"

"After a pause, it added. 'The years have been prosperous for them, but bitter their end. One blow has fallen, the other is pending!'"

"Remarkable."

"The two cases certainly must run together," decided Klein.

"I think so," agreed Dick. "Was there anything further, madam, that you can remember?"

"Remember! Every word of it is branded upon my brain forever!"

"Pray let us have the whole of the remarkable matter, then, so that we may know where to begin its solving."

"I tell you you will never solve the mystery."

"I think we will."

"Could you have seen the ghost as I saw it, you would see the folly of any such design."

"Perhaps."

"Well, there was another pause, and then my dead husband said: 'My revenge is all too tame, for the great wrong, but I send them in haste to answer before the great judge of all. Farewell.' And that was all."

"And what happened then?"

"The ghost waved its hand, just as Charles used to do, and was gone."

"Suddenly?"

"By fading rapidly, till it was gone, and then the light was the same as it had been before."

The two men looked at each other.

"It was just the same as the two ghost scenes in the saloons," said Klein.

"Exactly," agreed Dick.

"I have told mother about the one I saw," spoke up Charlie Bachert. "There must have been the same agency at work in them all."

"Precisely the same," agreed Dick. "You do not believe in ghosts, then?"

"I never did, but what am I to think now?"

"Oh! it was his ghost," cried the widow. "Nothing else could have appeared and disappeared in like manner."

"Well, it is hard to dispute it, madam," said Deadwood Dick, "but I am hard to convince, in that line. I think we shall find an explanation, somehow."

"I fail to see how."

"Well, madam, may we sit down? I desire to ask some questions."

"Why, certainly. Pardon me for keeping you standing."

"Don't mention it; I know you did not think. I only mention it now for your own sake."

They took seats there in the little room, the son near the door in order to have an eye upon the store.

"What you have said, madam, makes me eager to hear more," Dick observed.

"But, I said that was all, sir."

"I know, so far as the ghost was concerned, but there is more in connection with what the apparition had to say."

The woman looked down at the floor for some moments.

"It is of the past," she said.

"Seemst to me it is decidedly of the present," disputed Dick. "Will you answer one question?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Do you connect the death of Joseph Mainard in any manner with what was said by your ghostly visitor?"

"I do, sir. I have every reason to believe that he was one of the two meant."

"Mother, I think you had better stop," spoke up the son.

CHAPTER XIV.

WIDOW BACHERT'S STORY.

DICK and Klein looked at him in surprise. What harm could possibly come from the woman's telling all she knew about the matter?

"Why do you say that?" Dick asked.

"Because, trouble may come of this, perhaps."

"In what way?"

"You are a stranger to us."

"I am not a stranger to Mr. Klein here."

"My mother cannot prove that she saw what she claims to have seen."

The woman looked at her son in amaze. What had that to do with it?

"What do you mean, Charlie?" she asked.

"I will tell you what I mean, mother. We do not know this man, as I have said before, and Mr. Klein may be mistaken in him."

"No, no, there is no chance for mistake," Klein hastened to assure. "You may trust him the same as you would trust me."

He knew Deadwood Dick by reputation, and that was enough.

"You may trust me, sir," Dick assured.

"Yes, I know, but how far? Suppose suspicion should point to my mother as the slayer of Mainard, what then?"

"Good heavens!" the woman exclaimed. "Impossible!"

"Not at all impossible," said her son. "Somebody killed him, and you have now said enough to connect yourself with his affairs."

"But, sir," appealing to Deadwood Dick, "you could never suspect me of such a deed as that, could you? Besides, I have not been out of my store all the evening, so I am clear."

"You are not guilty, madam, and are not likely to be suspected," Dick assured her.

"Suppose she is," spoke the son.

"In that case, I will make it my business to establish her innocence."

"You may trust my friend fully," Klein again urged. "You cannot find an abler defender, the world over, than he."

"Then pray tell me the story," Dick requested.

"It goes a long way back," said the woman, "but I suppose you want it from the beginning?"

"Yes."

"Charles Bachert and Joseph Mainard were rivals for my hand—"

"Ha! that is a good starting point," Dick had to interrupt. "But, pardon me for breaking in upon you, madam."

"Certainly, sir. I loved Charles, but I did not like Mainard at all, and I gave him to understand it so, even though Charles was poor and he was rich. I married Charles Bachert."

"I follow you, madam."

"Well, Mainard vowed that he would be revenged upon me, and that I should some day repent having spurned his love, to repeat his own words. I had a dread of him for a time, but it wore away and I thought no more about him or his threats."

"Our boy was born, and we removed to a Western town, where for some years we prospered beyond our dreams, and it looked as if we must, in a few years, be able to return to the scenes of our early days, independent for the rest of our lives. But, a shadow was upon our pathway, and the tide, so to say, turned against us all at once and we went down and down."

"Bad luck met my husband at every turn, and it seemed as if some evil influence must be at work against him, but we could not detect where it was."

"It was hard, certainly."

"And yet the worst was still to come. One day my husband was missing, and I was almost crazed with concern for him. He had grown despondent, and I feared that he had taken his life."

"Was that the case?"

"Give me time and I will tell you all. I cannot help these breaks."

"Certainly."

"You see, sir, Charles had a suspicion that some enemy was at work against him, and he had taken a terrible oath that he would find him out and bring him to account."

"I see."

"And so it was that I could not fix upon anything concerning his fate. Sometimes I thought that he had killed himself; then again I would think that he had found his foe and had gotten the worst of the encounter. Be that as it might, I never saw him again."

"And that is all?"

"That is all of that. I gathered together the little I could, and started anew, alone and unaided, save for the little help Charlie could give me."

"About that time, or soon after, two strangers came into the place, having claims

against my husband's business, and they closed and took it all, beginning in the same line themselves."

"Those two men were, as I speedily learned, Joseph Mainard and William Tramwell, and then a suspicion dawned upon me. I went boldly to Mainard and faced him, accusing him of some knowledge of my husband, and of having ruined him in business for the sake of the revenge he had threatened."

"What was the effect?"

"Why, he showed greatest surprise at seeing me, saying he had no idea it was my husband he had bought out. He had forgotten the name, he said. He wanted to lend me assistance, but I refused. I had no proof against him, so could do nothing, and so I had to sit by and see him amass wealth out of my husband's business, while I mourned my husband, not knowing his fate."

"At length a letter was discovered, in my husband's handwriting, telling me that it was his intention to take his life, and that I should not mourn for him. It was impossible, the letter said, for him to begin life again, with everything against him, and he would not be a burden in my way if I could better myself by his death, so he would in that manner set me free. He said he thought I had made a mistake in marrying him, anyhow."

"And what did you think of that?"

"I denounced it at once as a forgery. It was not like my husband at all."

"But, you said that it was in his handwriting."

"Yes, so I thought. It was very like his."

"And you have said that he had grown despondent."

"Yes, yes, so he had."

"And it is possible that his mind gave way."

"I have thought of that, but I never believed it."

"Then what was your suspicion?"

"That the letter was a forgery, and that Joseph Mainard wrote it."

"What made you think that? Had you anything further than mere suspicion to back it up?"

"The fact that as soon as, or pretty soon after, he learned of the letter, which could be taken as proof that Charles was dead, he began to sue for my hand, but I made him the same answer as at first."

"And you have never heard of your husband in all that time?"

"Never."

"Which was proof that he was dead."

"I have long looked upon him as dead. Of course he must be dead."

"Why?"

"Have I not seen his ghost?"

"I take that as more in the way of proof that he is living."

The woman smiled sadly.

"No, no," she said. "If living, he would have come to me. While I do not believe that he killed himself, I do believe that he was murdered."

"And that Mainard killed him."

"He and Tramwell."

"There is room for suspicion, now, madam."

"If it could only be proven."

"Can you tell me more?"

"That is all."

"But, how came you here?"

"Yes, I will tell you that. I could not prosper at the old place; something seemed to be at work against me, so I pulled up and came to this new camp. But, Mainard followed me, and finally Tramwell came, too."

"And with what result?"

"With the result that, secretly, I have been persecuted, by some one, but I could never get proof against anybody. Mainard has persisted in his attentions, but I spurned

him, and my boy has never been able to prosper. I have laid it all to the account of those rascals."

CHAPTER XV.

THE SELF-COCKER SPORT NABBED.

Dick and Klein remained for some time.

Much more was said, but the foregoing chapter contains all the points of interest in the woman's story.

Enjoining upon her the necessity of silence until they could investigate a little, the two sports finally took leave and passed out upon the street.

The evening was now about spent.

"That was a strange matter," remarked Klein.

"A deucedly strange matter," declared Dick. "What do you make of it?"

"I agree with the woman."

"That Mainard was the foe with whom her husband had to deal, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Yes, that is certainly the way it looks. But, it is my opinion that Bachert is in the land among the living."

"I cannot help thinking so."

"And that his was the hand that settled Mainard."

"Yes."

Both were thoughtful.

"Well, where to?" asked Dick.

"I am inclined to spend the night at the Royal. I want to see the fun if there is an attack."

"It will be grim old fun for somebody."

"Yes, I agree with you in that," assented Klein. "Why, have you anything else on hand?"

"I would like to visit the Prince."

"Ha!"

"Why not?"

"You would run a risk."

"I am used to that, I can assure you."

"But, what is to be gained?"

"I want to look for that lost boy."

"And you think he is there?"

"I believe Tramwell knows where he is, anyhow."

They had stopped while they talked, and were speaking in low tones.

It was on a corner of two streets, where the shadows lay thick around, one of the electric lights being missing.

Of a sudden a full score of men leaped upon them.

Klein was sent to the ground with a blow that rendered him insensible, and the gang laid hold upon the Self-cocker Sport.

Dick did not have time to draw his guns, so sudden had been the attack, but he made it interesting for his captors just the same, and four or five of them were toppled over before he was overcome.

The odds was too great.

He recognized in his most obstinate antagonist the fellow known as Bullion Bullwhack.

"Wull, how aire ye now?" that worthy hissed in his ear, as soon as they had him down upon his back. "What is yer opine of things in general?"

It was impossible for Dick to reply, for hands were at his throat and also over his mouth, and the knee of Bullion Bullwhack was pressing hard upon his chest. He was in a tight place.

"How'n thunder d'ye think he is goin' ter speak?" another demanded. "Don't kill him; ther boss said take keer—"

"You shut yer head, cussed fool!"

But, enough has been let fall to apprise Dick that these fellows were not acting alone, but that there was a head to their doings.

Dick had ceased to struggle, for he feared for his life if he resisted further, and it was altogether useless.

In a few moments he was gagged and bound.

It had all happened so quickly that no

observer, unless close at hand, could have discerned what had taken place.

Picking their prisoner up, half a dozen of the fellows carried him away down the darkened street, while the rest remained there, engaging in wrestling as a blind to fool witnesses.

The six with the prisoner made haste.

Going a roundabout way, they were, ere long, on the premises of the Prince Mine.

Here was a huge building that had formerly been used a miners' boarding-house, and into one of the rooms of this building the prisoner was carried.

There was Tramwell, and some of his followers.

"Hello! what have you there?" he demanded.

"A prisoner," answered Bullwhack.

"So I see; but, what are you going to do with him?"

"Keep him."

"Yes, but why have you brought him here?"

"Yer see, ther mob is bound ter hang him, an' we have brought him here ter save his life."

"Oh, well, if that is the case we will take care of him, of course. I will do all in my power to protect him, in spite of the danger I run in doing so. I have nothing against him."

Dick understood all this by-play, of course.

"Whar shall we put him?" asked Bullwhack.

"Take that gag from his mouth, so he can speak," was the order.

It was done.

"You heard what was said?" Tramwell asked.

"Certainly," returned Dick.

"And you can understand that I am running some risk by thus befriending you, of course."

"I am well aware that you are, sir, and a mighty big risk at that," was the grim rejoinder. "It is a risk you are not asked to assume."

"But, these men want me to take care of you."

"And I don't want you to."

"If you are freed you will persist in facing the danger?"

"Most assuredly."

"And at the risk of your valuable life. I must comply with the request of these good citizens and hold you for the rest of the night, anyhow."

"Say," demanded Dick, "how far can you see into a pine board, my good friend?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say that I can see just as far. This whole thing is so plain that it is a disgrace to you to carry on the deception further."

"Would you hint that I have ordered your capture?"

"Yes, of course!"

Tramwell leaped to his feet.

"Release him, men, and at once!" he cried.

"Let them hang him if they want to; I wash my hands of him!"

"But, et's by ther mayor's orders that we hev brought him hyer," protested Bullion Bullwhack. "He said he must be taken keer of at any cost, an' ther jail was no safe place."

There was a button missing somewhere in their scheme.

This was the part the Bullwhack should have played at first, for then it would have stood more to reason.

Dick smiled.

"It is all as weak as watered milk," he said. "Whatever you are going to do, do it and have it done with."

"I have no choice in the matter if the mayor orders it," growled Tramwell.

"No, I suppose not."

"And you can thank him and not me for

the protection I am obliged to give you, sir."

"I am aware of it."

"Suppose I release you, will you give me your word that you will remain here and not rush out into danger?"

"Not by a good deal!"

"That settles it, then; men, take him down below and secure him till the mayor sends further instructions."

"And make sure that I am well secured, too," cried Dick fiercely. "There will be a squaring of accounts when I get on deck again, and don't you forget it, my friend."

Dick was tempted to accuse the man of murder, but he did not dare risk his life so far, just then.

Tramwell laughed, and the prisoner was taken up and carried out of the room and down a flight of rickety stairs to a damp, dismal hole beneath, where he was secured to a stout post.

And there he was left, his captors taunting him as they withdrew with the light, locking him down when they closed the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STREAK OF PURE LUCK.

DEADWOOD DICK was decidedly out of the race for the time being.

It was the fortune of war, and he must grin and bear it. It was not the first time by many that he had been overcome.

"Well, they have got me here, that is a fact," he said to himself. "And, by the looks of things they mean to keep me, too. I wanted to visit the Prince, but not in just this manner."

They had not disarmed him; probably had not thought of it. Or, leaving him so securely bound, had not thought it necessary, it might be. But, the first was probably the reason.

Dick tugged at his bonds, but there was no getting loose.

His captors had made sure of one thing, and that was that he should not get out of their hands till they were ready to let him go.

He had been gagged again, and his hands and feet were securely tied, besides which he was doubly secured to the post, which was one of the supports of the building.

It did not take Dick long to discover that escape was out of the question.

He must wait and trust to fortune.

There was nothing but the bare floor between him and the room above, and in some places the light came through the cracks and holes.

Of course, there was not enough light to make things visible in the dismal hole, but the cracks served to render plain the voice of the men in the room, and Dick could hear what was said.

At first, when they had returned to the room, their talk was about him, and whether or not he had been left secure.

Finally it took another turn.

"Is everything ready fer ther 'tack?" he heard Bullion Bullwhack ask.

"Everything will be ready by daylight," answered Tramwell, "and then is when we will go for them."

"And what is yer plan?"

"We will divide into two parties, and one will make a rush to the right and the other to the left."

"What's that fer?"

"It will force the defenders to divide their number and rush to two points of defense at once, and then we shall have them where we want them."

"But, we'll be divided too, won't we?"

"We are two to their one."

"Yes, that's so, but—"

"Wait till you hear all. When we have got them divided, we will make a sudden

rush for the center of that fence, all together, and carry it away and be in possession before they can tell what has happened."

"Hooray!"

"Bully fer you, Tramwell!"

And the fellows shouted over the plan as explained.

"Nor is that all," added the chief villain of the lot. "We will then have their force divided, and will be right between the two halves. They won't dare to shoot a gun at us."

This called forth more cheering, and one of the fellows proposed a drink on the success of the thing.

Deadwood Dick saw that it was a good scheme, and one that might be carried out as planned, unless the men of the Royal could be warned.

Gradually the talking overhead ceased, as one after another left the room, till at last it seemed that all must have gone out, or else those remaining were asleep.

Numerous times Dick had tried his bonds, but in vain.

He had known at first that it would be impossible for him to get loose without aid, but still he tried.

While he was trying hard to think of some plan by which he could draw attention, in order to get a chance to fight his way out, if he could but get the use of his limbs for a moment, somebody touched him.

For some moments he had been standing perfectly still, and the person who had touched him seemed to be groping around in the dark.

Dick had heard some slight sounds, but thought the rats had made them.

The person drew back, instantly.

Dick caught the sound of a quick, hard breath, as if of fear, and he wished himself free of the gag that he might speak.

There was not a sound, for some moments, and at length Dick gave vent to a low moan, as if in pain, and listened. He was sure he heard breathing close to him, and his ears were keen to catch the slight sound.

He repeated the noise.

Immediately he heard the softest possible footstep, receding from him, and he knew not what to make of it.

Whoever the person was, it seemed that he was frightening him, or her, away from him, and it was possible that this very person might prove a friend, if he could but gain attention.

He repeated the sound he had made several times in succession, and down in his throat tried to articulate—"Help me!"

This last he repeated.

Presently a faint, frightened whisper was heard saying:

"Mister?"

Dick repeated the effort at framing the two words.

"Mister?"

This time it was nearer, and Dick recognized that it was in a rather weak, childish voice.

All Dick could do was to repeat again what he tried to frame, and this time it seemed to him as if the words must be understood aright.

The next moment a hand touched him again.

Dick stood still, and it felt around his person till it came to his hands, tied behind him and to the post, when the little voice exclaimed:

"You a prisoner, too!"

"Yes," Dick tried to say.

Like a flash it had come to him that this might be Blondow's missing boy!

The little hands felt upward till they came to his face, when immediately the fingers tried to unfasten the gag.

It was not easy to undo the knot, but presently it was done.

"Thank God!" were Dick's first words.

"Who are you?" asked the boy.

"I am looking for you, if you are Charlie Blondow."

"And I guess you wouldn't found me in a hurry, think ye would? But, I found you."

"Well, put your hand in my pocket, my boy, and get out my knife and cut the cords that hold me. Take care not to cut me while you are about it, though."

The little fellow obeyed, and Dick was soon freed.

"You are a trump!" Dick exclaimed. "Now, tell me about yourself, my lad, and how you came here."

It was too long to quote as he told it.

He had been lured into the house by one of Tramwell's tools, had been made a prisoner, and had been confined in a sort of cage in another cellar.

For a long time he had been busy trying to dig his way out under the wall against which his cage was situated, and on this night had succeeded in doing so. He was groping around when he touched Dick.

This contact had terrified him out of his wits, almost, and it had required a good deal of courage for him to speak.

"Well, we will try it together, now," said Dick, "and I think we shall be able to make a go of it. I am going to take you to your papa."

He had lighted a match ere this and taken a look at the little fellow.

The boy was very thin and pale, but his eyes were bright and his face was intelligent and full of strength of character.

At the same time the boy had taken a good look at Dick, and the latter had noted by the expression of his face that he felt better for having seen the face of his friend.

Dick examined well the cellar they were in, and found that a pair of double doors led from it at the rear of the building.

These were hooked on the inside. It was quite probable that they were fastened outside, too.

On trying them, however, Dick was amazed to find that such was not the case.

He opened one, with silent care and caution.

There came no challenge, and stooping, he bade the boy get upon his back and take hold around his neck, and to hold fast, no matter what happened. And the little chap obeyed the directions.

With him on his back, and with weapons in hand ready for any emergency, Dick cautiously made his way up out of the cellar, and took a wide detour in the direction of the Royal Mine.

CHAPTER XVII.

ATTACK AND DEFENSE.

NOTHING happened along the way.

Dick met no one, and made his way unseen to the point where the sentinel of the Royal had before challenged him and Klein.

"Halt!" was the order.

"You bet!" said Dick, cheerfully, but in low tone.

"Who are you?"

"The same man who came in with Klein during the evening."

"We have to be mighty keeful."

"I have got Blondow's lost boy with me."

"What! you hev found Charlie?"

"Is that you, Toggy?" piped the little fellow, calling the man by his popular name.

"Sure it is, lad! Thank ther good Lord you aire safe again. Pass right on with him, sir, fer thar couldn't be no better proof of yer 'tentions."

So, Dick hurried on, and was soon in the mine.

Here he asked for Blondow.

The colonel was soon forthcoming, and at sight of his son he wept for joy.

He embraced the little fellow, kissing him again and again, and Charlie returned the embraces fondly.

"Where did you find him, sir?" the father demanded.

"It was he found and rescued me, sir," was Dick's response. "He was a prisoner at Tramwell's mine."

"I was sure of it, curse the wretch!"

Dick briefly told his experience.

"Yes, we heard about it," said Blondow. "That is, we learned that you had been taken."

"How did you learn that?"

"Klein crept in here, more dead than alive, and told of the attack, and five of my men are out looking for you."

"Have you any understanding with them concerning a signal by which they are to be called in?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Two rifle shots, close together."

"Then let them be fired. You will need all your force at daybreak."

"What's up?"

"An attack will be made at that time."

"We are prepared for it. And, we have an extra stretch of pipe all ready."

"How far will it reach?"

"Within throwing distance of the Prince buildings."

"Good! We will make them think there is a second deluge on hand, if I don't mistake."

"You bet!"

"But, let those shots be fired."

The colonel gave the order, and it was executed promptly.

Deadwood Dick then told of the plan of the attack, as he knew it, and Blondow listened attentively.

"It might have fooled us," he admitted.

"In fact, it very probably would have done so. But, thanks to you, we are now fore-armed."

"No thanks to me at all, but to our brave little boy here," declared Dick. "He would have made good his escape without any of my help, I certainly believe, while only for him I would be a prisoner still."

Dick paid a visit to Klein, where he was lying on a rude bunk in one of the buildings, and found that he was quite badly hurt, but not dangerously.

From that time on preparations were made for the daybreak attack.

The situation was explained to all the men, fully, each man was given his work to do, and it looked as if success must be won.

Deadwood Dick was in charge, actually.

The plan was, that when the attack was made, the men within the inclosure were to divide into two parties and start off in two directions.

They were to go with a whoop and yell, to give the impression to the enemy that they were falling into the trap, but they were to stop and turn back again to the real point of attack.

There the fence had been weakened, purposely.

When the rush was made against it, it would fall easily, and then the fun would begin.

Knowing the character of Tramwell and his followers, and having a little score of his own to settle, Deadwood Dick was nothing loth to be on the side of the Royal in the fray.

At length daylight began to appear.

Every man was at his post, and each had a clear understanding as to what was expected of him.

When it grew lighter, so that objects could be fairly well distinguished, a terrific yell was suddenly heard in the direction of the Prince, and then came the charge.

Whooping and yelling they came, as if trying by their noise to drown the roar of the falls.

They divided as they ran, half running to the right and half to the left, and as if alarmed by this action, the defenders set up

a yell within the inclosure and ran to the defense.

Tramwell in person was in charge of one body, and Bullion Bullwhack was in command of the other.

The ruse within deceived them utterly.

Dick had reason to believe that they had not yet discovered his escape, and they would not have suspicions of the true state of affairs.

They whooped and yelled the more, and ran the harder and faster, until they considered their scheme well carried out, and then of a sudden they wheeled and ran for the center.

By this time the men within the inclosure had returned quietly.

The shouting of the enemy ceased, when they turned, until they came together, when they rushed at the attack with a wild whoop.

Right up against the stout fence they dashed, hoping to give it such a strain that it could be broken down; but, what must have been their surprise when it fell before them easily!

In they went, heels over head, and in a moment all was disorder with them.

Then began the fun, in earnest.

It was truly a new kind of warfare, but it proved an effective one, for men could not stand for a moment against the terrific force of water that was suddenly turned upon them.

The moment after the fall of the fence the water was turned on.

Six men were at the nozzle of the pipe, in order to hold and direct it with ease and dispatch, and Deadwood Dick directed them.

Bullion Bullwhack got the first dose.

He was falling headlong over the fence, as it lay flat, trying in vain to stop himself, when the stream of water caught him and picked him up.

"There you go, Bullwhack!" cried Deadwood Dick.

And there he did go, true enough! He was picked up bodily and sent headlong over the heads of those behind, and others followed him instantly.

It was no battle at all, for it was all one-sided. That stream of water did the whole business, clearing the way wherever it was turned, and just as soon as the mob saw what was up, they wheeled and ran, while the men of the Royal cheered with a vim!

The stream of water was kept turned upon them, and not a man escaped at least a severe drenching before he could get out of range.

One who escaped with little harm done was Tramwell.

He had dropped back from the attack upon the fence, and the first thing he saw, as the fence went down, was the hydraulic means of defense.

Not only that, but he saw his late prisoner there to direct it, and was the first to make the effort to get out of range; and he met with fair success, but not with a dry skin.

As soon as the mob had been put to flight, Dick signaled for the water to be closed off.

A hundred men ran out the other stretch of pipe, which had already been coupled in one length, and this was quickly attached to the first, and reached nearly to the Prince.

Another signal, and the water was turned on again.

The enemy had now all taken refuge in the buildings around the Prince, but their shelter was all too frail, as they soon found.

The finger of water picked off the chimneys, tore off the shingles like so much chaff before a whirlwind, ripped out the timbers and hurled them around like match wood, and in less than a quarter of an hour the whole property lay demolished.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOSING SCENES.

QUITE a number of men had been hurt, but none killed, as it happened.

Care had been taken, when the water was turned upon the buildings, to give the rascals time to escape with their lives.

But, they were utterly defeated and routed, and the men of the Royal were complete masters of the situation. A cheer went up, in which the majority of the people of the town heartily joined.

Blondow shook hands with Deadwood Dick.

"That was well done, mighty well done!" he exclaimed.

"And I think your enemy has had a lesson he will not forget," assumed Dick.

"He will not forget it, that is just the point," observed the colonel. "He will plan revenge."

"Well, fight it out with him. He will probably go to law now, and collect damages, if he can, and I suppose there will be something to pay, but that rich ledge can stand it."

"Yes, more than stand it."

"Misther Blondow! Look ye here, be-gorra!"

So cried Birdie McGluken, as he came running up with something in his hands.

"What is it, Birdie?" Blondow asked.

"Dhe original map av dhe Royal, sure as you're born!"

"And where did you get it?" asked the mine-owner, taking it eagerly.

"Sure, dhe wather washed it out of Tramwell's ranch, when it wint down in dhe flood," the jolly young Irishman explained.

Blondow examined it, and found that it was, indeed, the missing document.

And upon it was the missing line that was wanting upon the later records, and here was proof of Tramwell's villainy.

Barely had this news been received, when word was brought that Tramwell had been found murdered, with a knife, killed in precisely the same manner as had been Joseph Mainard.

Then came freshly to mind the phantom-coffin.

Deadwood Dick hurried off to the scene of the crime, and found Tramwell dead with a look of horror on his face.

The excitement ran high, as may be supposed.

Mad Anthony, the mayor, had no word of sympathy for Tramwell, but he did want the mystery cleared up.

And so did the people, but they were doomed, in a measure, to disappointment, for it was never to be made clear to them as a whole, though it might be explained by inference.

As the excitement abated, recollection was had of the man in the jail.

The people demanded that he should be brought to trial.

When they went to get him, though, it was found that he was gone, without the knowledge of the guardsmen around the jail.

But there was a written message.

It was this:

"MAYOR AND OTHERS:—

"Permit me to bid you a kind adieu. Your guess concerning me was not altogether wrong; let that suffice. The same power that could produce such things as were seen last night, could take me out of your snug little calaboose. A sweet revenge has been had. Two wretches got their just deserts. A word of apology to Center-fire, the Self-cocker. We did not know you, or there would have been no reason to fear you. Beg pardon.

"JACOB MUNDY."

"What ther doose does he mean by that?" demanded the mayor.

"I think his partner fired that shot at me, through mistake," answered Dick. "And yet that is hardly satisfactory, either."

"That must be it, though."

It was found, later, that Lacy Mulvern was missing in the camp.

Not that much was thought of it, till a note was discovered in his room at the hotel.

And that note, while it cleared away some things, only addee to the mystery surrounding others. It was in these words:

"DEADWOOD DICK:—

"Drop the case where it is. It is ended, now, and further probing can do no one any good. If you push on, you will only gratify your personal curiosity, for you have nothing else to gain. And, you may be unable even to gain that much. I understand it all, and am lending aid where it is deserved. As to the feud between Tramwell and Blondow, there was a woman in the case.

"L. M."

"Who is Deadwood Dick?" demanded the crowd, as soon as this was known to them, and Center-fire, the Self-cocker, had to own his identity.

Then the camp let itself loose, indeed!

Dick went apart with Blondow, the mayor, and others immediately connected with the matter, and Blondow made a further statement.

The woman mentioned was a lady for whose hand he and Tramwell had been rivals, and the stealing of the boy had been with the object of so distressing Blondow that Tramwell could carry his point.

But, in that he had overreached himself, for the lady in question had loved the child, and it only warmed her heart the more toward Blondow in his sorrow. Something further that came to light made it plain that Tramwell had intended to kill the child, eventually.

Blondow's housekeeper had had a hand in the abduction, too.

She herself loved Blondow, and Tramwell had entirely made a tool of her, and a willing one, for the carrying out of his designs.

Being a widow and a woman without heart, and having a son of her own, she cared nothing for Blondow's child. She had rather, in fact, that he were out of the way, and hence her part in the matter.

In the course of the day John Klein recovered sufficiently to be around, and he and Dick together set about solving the remainder of the mystery.

But, it seemed that it was already finished.

What more came to light amounted to but little, while certain obstacles arose which served to make the shadows all the darker.

For some reason Deadwood Dick stopped short.

What had he discovered?

Perhaps it was that Jacob Mundy, or "Old Saint," was the missing Charles Bachert, and that Lacy Mulvern was a younger brother of his wife, the widow Bachert.

Suppositions for which there were some grounds.

One thing that was discovered, was a sort of instrument, something after the manner of a stereomonscope, but having a chamber for the reception of a powerful reflector.

This was found near the edge of the falls, as if the attempt had been made to throw it over into the river.

Within this thing remained a bit of magnesium taper.

Did this explain, to a degree, the mystery of the shadow-coffin? And of the ghost Mrs. Bachert had seen?

Let the reader say.

For once, Deadwood Dick felt that he had made a poor success; and yet, what would either case have amounted to without him?

It had been, so to say, a double-decker, and he had been on deck in both cases, from first to last. He had accomplished the leading purpose that had brought him to Roaring River.

He declined, however, to accept any reward beyond his actual expenses, saying

that Charlie Blondow would have made good his escape just as well without him; if anything, the balance of obligation was the other way; but Col. Blondow thought differently.

Before his departure, a rousing reception was given in his honor.

The Widow Bachert and her son quietly disappeared from Roaring River, after a time, and were lost to the world.

Whither they had gone, no one knew, but we, with our higher privileges, may venture a guess. And yet it need not be called that; we will lift the curtain a little and let the picture suggest.

Afar off, in a pleasant home, neither rich nor poor, but happy and contented, we see a family of three; father, mother son. Their name is not Bachert; very little is known about them. They are honest, humble people, who love one another fondly.

THE END.

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